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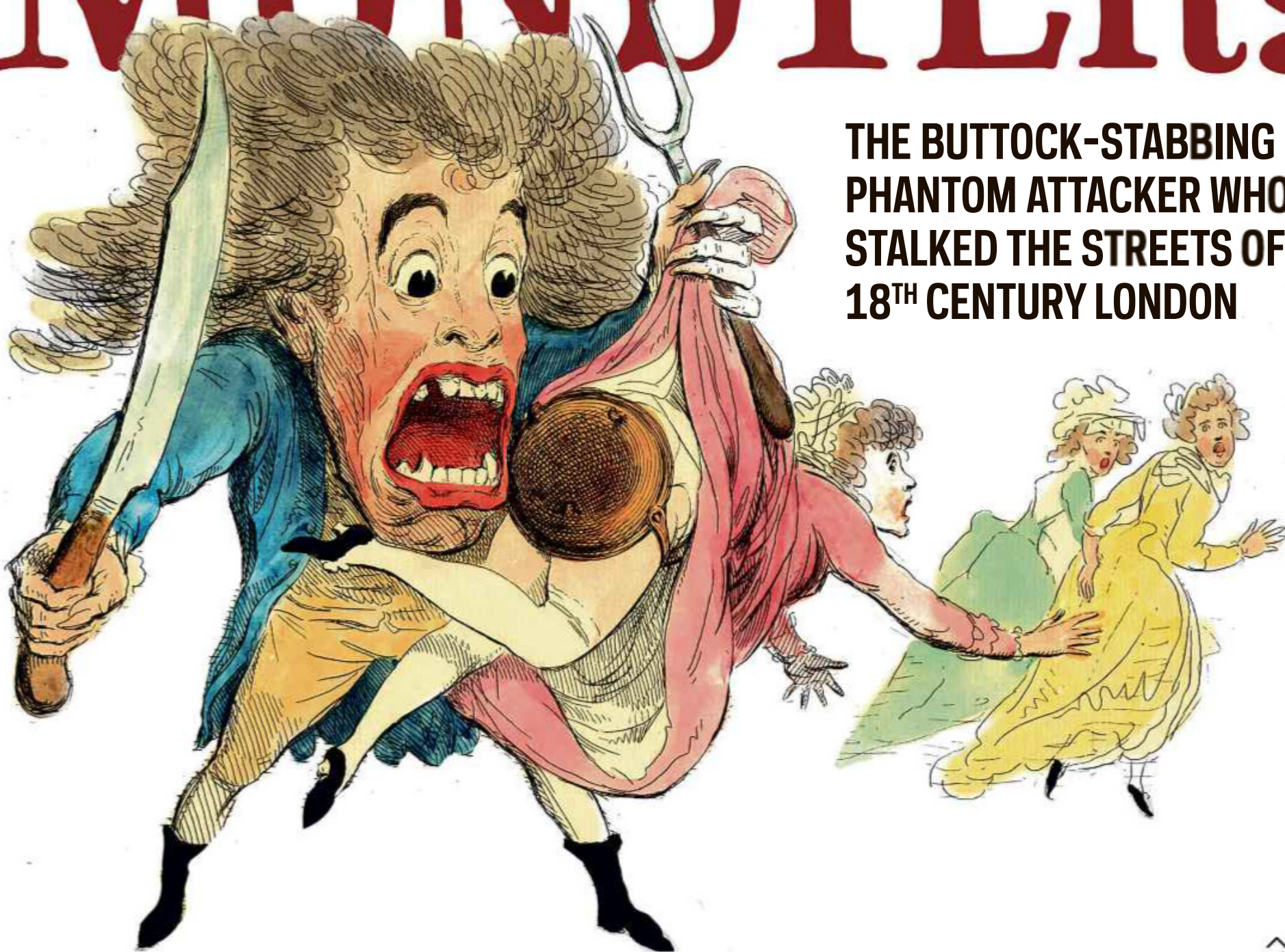
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PHANTOM ATTACKER WHO
STALKED THE STREETS OF
18TH CENTURY LONDON



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HAVING A LAUGH?

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PIG IN THE WORLD

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INVESTIGATING INDIANA'S
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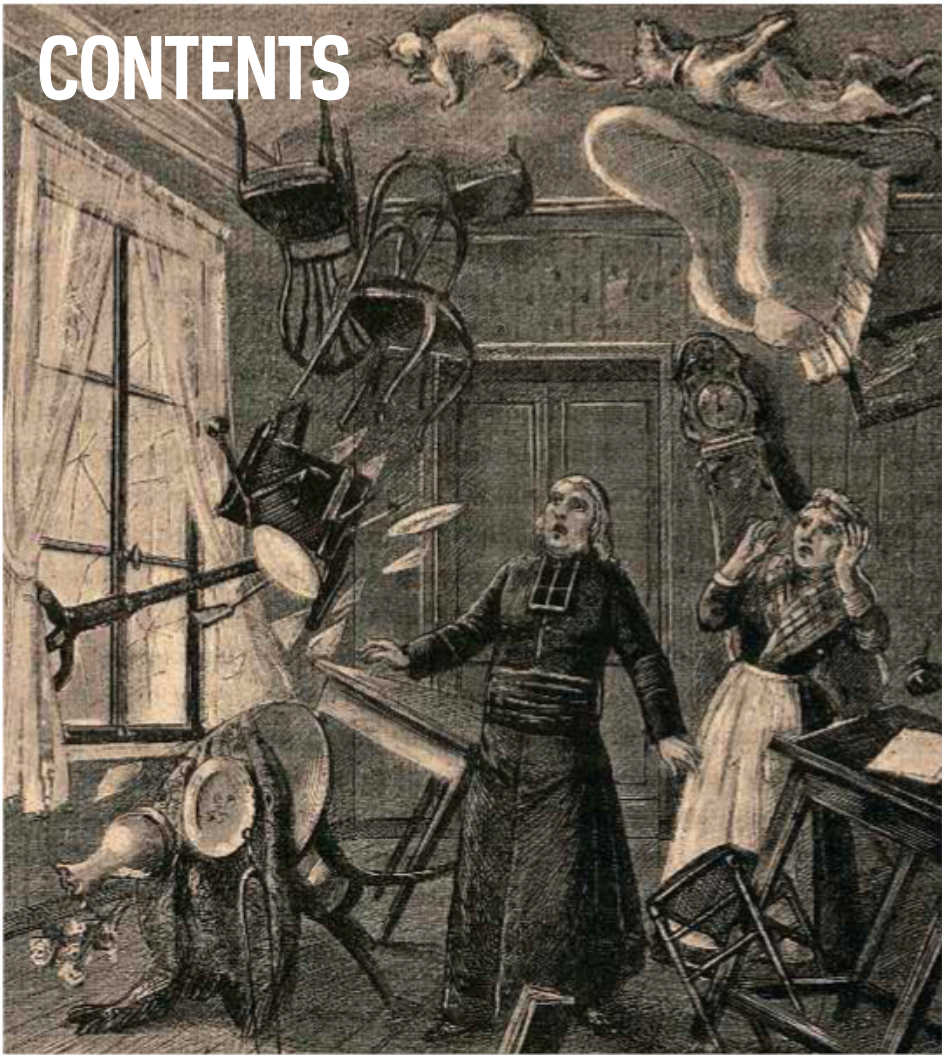
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CHRONICLE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



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FORTEAN TIMES 391

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Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

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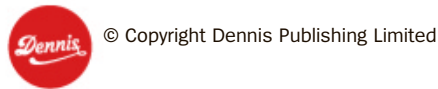
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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

PARAKEETS ON MARS



FT NEWS – IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

As we've said many times before, news clippings are the lifeblood of *FT*, and we appeal to readers worldwide to join in the fun and send us your clippings – for more info on how to get involved, turn to p78.

Existing clippers: note that we now have a new address to which you should send your stories and clippings. The old PO Box will continue to operate for a few months, but from now on, please email news stories to csjosiffe@forteantimes and address your much-appreciated clippings envelopes to:

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ERRATA

FT387:22: Martin Jenkins, feeling slightly sheepish about regularly drawing attention to our shortcomings, writes: "Sorry to do it to you again – but Alan Murdie's done it to you. On p22, he refers to Thomas Becket haunting the Tower of London in 1140. Quite an achievement when Becket didn't die until 1170! I presume from the reference to Henry III (1216-1272) that this should have read 1240." Richard Ecclestone also pointed out this error, as did Steve Scanlon, who found an online reference suggesting that Becket's haunting of the Tower actually dates to 1241: "One of the first sightings ever recorded was the ghost of Thomas Becket, first seen in 1241, 71 years after his murder in Canterbury Cathedral... Although the presence of Becket's ghost is unusual because he was not killed at the Tower, it was fitting that he returned to haunt it, because he was a Londoner who once had been Constable

of the Tower. More unusual was Becket's probable reason for haunting the Tower. It seems that the Tower's neighbours were being disturbed by alterations made at the site and Becket's ghost appeared to protest them. A priest reportedly saw the apparition striking the walls with his cross, whereupon they immediately crumbled." <https://occult-world.com/haunted-england/tower-of-london/>

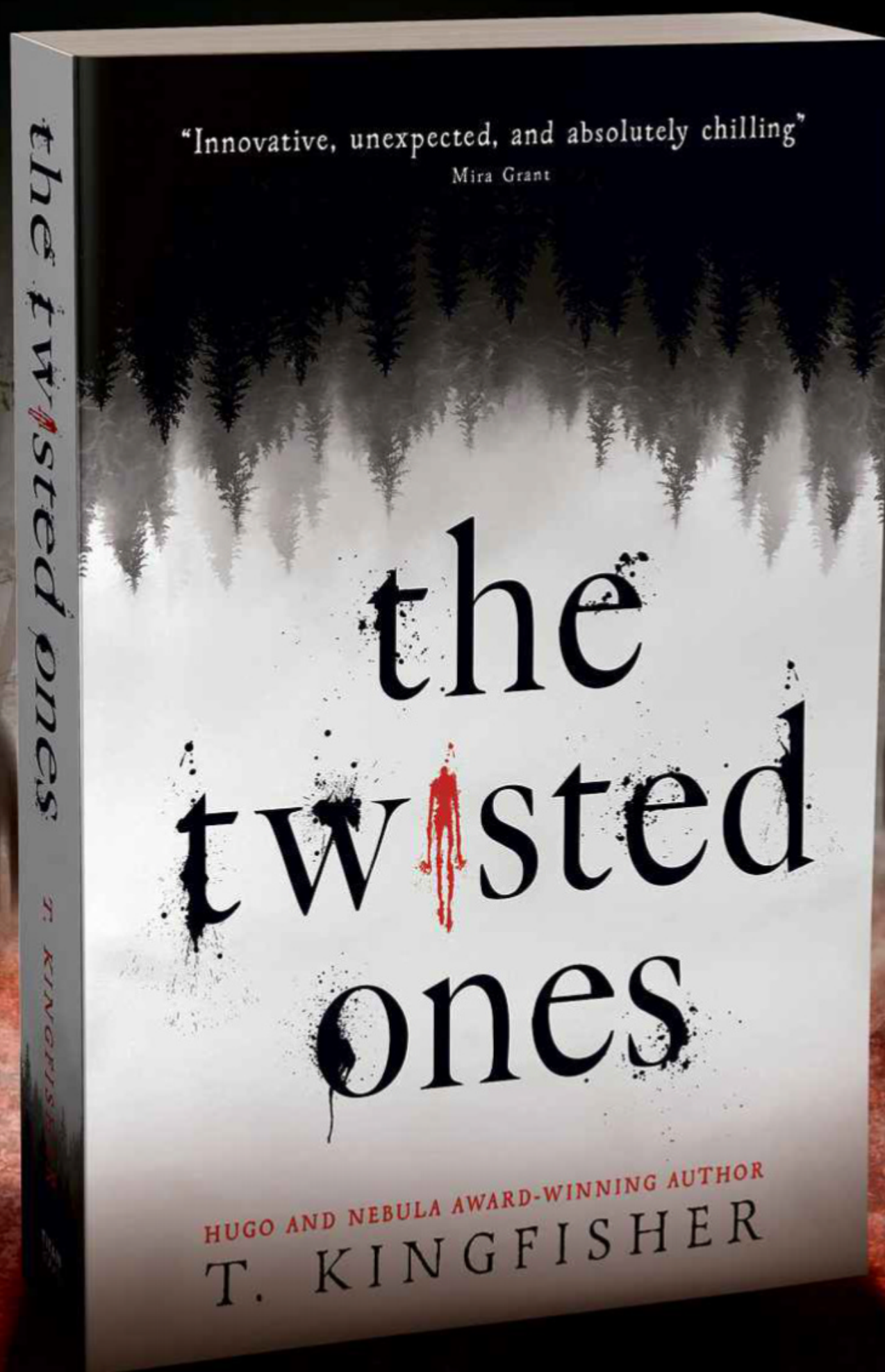
FT389:26: In what is possibly our favourite cock-up of recent months, one which appeared to add to the gaiety of nations (or at least Twitter), we published a photo of two parakeets with the caption: "One of the recent photos from NASA's Curiosity explorer showed an unexpected bright flash on the surface of Mars." Martin Stubbs correctly spotted that this caption was a hangover from the previous issue (**FT387:30**); Rob Gandy noted that a pair of parakeets on the Red Planet would have been "something genuinely fortean"; and Dave Miles asked: "Is it just me, or does anyone else see the optical illusion of two parakeets sitting on a branch in the photo of the bright flash of light? Eat your heart out, Face on Mars!" Leslie Vinson of Tucson, AZ, thanked us "because – would you believe it? – NASA's censors kept this news from us here in the States. I hope your fine magazine doesn't get in trouble for printing the truth." Perhaps the funniest response was the photo posted on Twitter by Harold Weaver Smith, reproduced above.

DAVID R. SUTTON

BOB RICKARD




PAUL SIEVEKING

I am going to try to start at the beginning,
even though I know you won't believe me...



"This is righteous, folkloric horror, and the devil
is waiting in between these pages"

CHUCK WENDIG

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

CORONAVIRUS COMES WEST

The spread of Covid-19 has brought panic buying, medical disinformation and defiant French Smurfs



DAMIEN MEYER / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: In France, Smurfs ignore official advice and go for the Guinness World Record.

With the coronavirus (Covid-19) epidemic having apparently peaked in China, attention shifted to the rest of the world, where, at the time of writing, some countries were already experiencing hundreds of fatalities. The gradual realisation that the Western world would not escape the virus saw social media awash with unorthodox theories as to how to avoid infection.

Eating large amounts of garlic was one such theory. While garlic has some antimicrobial properties, it is ineffective against Covid-19. Indeed, the advice may itself lead to health problems; it was reported in the *South China Morning Post* that a woman received hospital treatment for a severely inflamed throat after consuming 1.5kg (3.3lb) of raw garlic. That universal panacea, MMS or “miracle mineral supplement” (otherwise known as the bleaching agent chlorine dioxide) was proposed as a Covid-19 preventative by various social media influencers and salespeople. Similarly, various ‘medical freedom’ groups

on Facebook were advancing the idea that consumption of colloidal silver could help. A guest on disgraced televangelist Jim Bakker’s TV show claimed it would kill some strains of coronavirus within 12 hours. More folly disseminated via Facebook argued that an unnamed ‘Japanese doctor’ has recommended drinking water every 15 minutes in order to flush out any virus that may have entered the mouth. An Arabic version of this advice had been shared more than 250,000 times.

More false information: a self-described scientist on Twitter informed people that hand sanitisers, being anti-bacterial, were useless against the Covid-19 virus. However, while alcohol-based sanitisers are ineffective against norovirus (the winter vomiting bug), the coronavirus has an envelope structure which alcohol can attack. Shortages of hand sanitiser in the shops led to home-made recipes being circulated. Unfortunately, the most effective solutions require between 60 and 95 per cent alcohol, so recipes calling for

neat vodka (typically 40 per cent proof) wouldn’t be successful. Hand sanitisers were not the only product to be in short supply. Supermarkets’ stocks of dried pasta, pet food and toilet roll were depleted as panic-buying customers ‘prepped’ for self-isolation. In early February, prior to coronavirus-driven supermarket frenzy, an Australian family accidentally found themselves in possession of a most sought-after product when they mistakenly ordered 48 boxes (instead of 48 rolls) of toilet paper; they now have 2,300 rolls, enough for 12 years.

Advice falsely attributed to UNICEF relied on the idea that viruses cannot survive heat, and suggested that drinking hot beverages and sitting in the sun would be sufficient to kill off Covid-19. In fact, temperatures of around 60°C (140°F) are required to destroy the virus.

Elsewhere, a refusal of the prevailing advice to stay at home and avoid contact with strangers was evident. The travel industry’s hashtag #keepcalmtravelon is one example; in Italy, defiant Twitter slogans like #cultureagainstfear now look foolhardy. Nicola Zingaretti, leader of the Democratic Party, announced he had tested positive after hosting a #MilanDoesntStop party.

Seeking historical analogies, the Covid-19 epidemic has been compared with the 1918 ‘Spanish Flu’ pandemic which killed millions. As today, official reaction was varied. In September 1918, Philadelphia’s health commissioner allowed 200,000 people to march in a huge parade; in the ensuing weeks, some 12,000 citizens

died. By contrast, and ignoring the objections of influential businessmen, St Louis’s health commissioner closed the city’s schools, bars, cinemas, and sporting events. As a result, his city’s per capita fatality rate was half that of Philadelphia (around 1,700 people died in St Louis).

On 9 March 2020, Landerneau in western France hosted a gathering of 3,500 cosplayers wearing white hats and painted blue in an attempt to break the Guinness World Record for the most people dressed as Smurfs. This came one day before France banned events of over 1,000 people. “We figured we wouldn’t worry and that as French people we wouldn’t give up on our attempt to break the record and now we’re champions of the world,” said one Smurf, while another declared: “It was more important; the coronavirus is no big deal – it’s nothing.” After Italy, France currently has the highest Covid-19 infection rate in Europe. More prudently, the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes announced that its healing pools would temporarily close, while the Church of England currently recommends its priests to offer consecrated wafers only during Communion (no wine), and to discourage handshakes during ‘the sharing of the peace’.

The ensuing weeks will see more disinformation, panic and useless remedies. Stay safe, and remember to wash your hands! ncbi.nlm.nih.gov, 6 Feb; itv.com, 5 Mar; catholicherald.co.uk, 3 Mar; msn.com, wired.co.uk, 6 Mar; guardian.co.uk, 7 Mar; [BBC News](https://bbc.com), 8 Mar; thecut.com, express.co.uk, 9 Mar; churchofengland.org, theatlantic.com, 10 Mar 2020.



PREHISTORIC WEANING

World's oldest baby bottles discovered

PAGE 13



THE 'DEMON CHURCH'

Occult crime hits Lincolnshire village

PAGE 18



MIRACLE MITTENS

Padre Pio's trademark gloves on tour

PAGE 27

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

NOEL ROONEY finds the Labour party's antisemitism problem back in the spotlight amid claims that members have been attending a series of talks about conspiracy theories

KEEP TALKING

Conspiracism is regularly portrayed as the intellectual preserve of right-wing propagandists. There is a kind of truth in this observation, of course; much of the content in the Conspirasphere is provided either by people whose views are avowedly right-wing, or those who claim no political affiliation, but whose views and statements lend themselves to right-wing points of view. But the fact that many right-wingers are conspiracy theorists does not mean that all conspiracy theorists are; nor does it mean that conspiracism can be located neatly on a traditional political axis. A recent report on a conspiracy group called Keep Talking is a case in point.

The report, by the Community Safety Trust, an organisation that "works to protect British Jews from antisemitism, terrorism, hate crime and related threats", and Hope Not Hate, an anti-racist charity, focuses on the peculiar mix of people, from Labour party members (and ex-members) to scions of the political right, who have attended the group's meetings. Keep Talking was co-founded by Ian Fantom and Nick Kollerstrom, well-known figures in the British Conspirasphere; Kollerstrom has a reputation as a Holocaust revisionist, and Fantom, a prominent 9/11 truther, has written in defence of Labour party members expelled for anti-Semitic views, in an article that morphs into a lengthy and rambling peroration on Theodore Herzl, the father of Zionism.

Keep Talking's schedule of talks is pretty standard conspiratorial fare, on the whole. Since 2017, there have been talks on 9/11, 7/7, the death of Princess Diana, alternative views on climate change (one of them by Jeremy Corbyn's brother, Piers), and the assassination of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme. There have been some decidedly curious topics on the agenda: mind control in the James Bond movies, for instance, or the intriguingly titled 'The British Council, Mind Control and Russia'. But there

have also been talks on the Holocaust and the formation of the state of Israel that have encouraged groups like CST to suggest the group is an incubator for antisemitism, and the presence of people associated with the Labour party at their gatherings is thus, CST claim, a matter of concern.

The Labour party has struggled with claims of antisemitism for some time now, and its (some might say desultory) efforts to put its house in order on this issue have resulted in the expulsion of several high-profile members. Its history of support for the Palestinians, and consequent opposition to the Israeli government, has resulted in some pretty ambiguous accusations, and equally ambiguous rebuttals. And a number of the people CST identify as speakers and attendees at Keep Talking are among those expelled for antisemitism.

A number of ticklish subjects intersect here. First, of course, the Labour party's difficulty in supporting Palestinians, and thus criticising the Israeli government, and at the same time attempting to distance itself from accusations of antisemitism, are not helped by reports of members apparently applauding acknowledged Holocaust deniers such as James Thring, or Alison Chabloz (a paid-up party member as recently as 2015). For Jeremy Corbyn, the fact that his brother has spoken at Keep Talking is embarrassing.

Conspiracy theory, as a phenomenon in its own right, is both elusive and ubiquitous in this controversy. All parties are using the term more as a shibboleth than a concept, as a signifier for a political stance; it is visible only to its opponents, as a sort of ghost vehicle, carrying the objects of their fear. Its own grand narrative is subsumed in the service of a fractured politics to which it doesn't, in its pure form, subscribe. Perhaps this is the inevitable consequence of its shift into the mainstream: to be weaponised and simultaneously dematerialised, until it exists only as a metaphor for an illegitimate narrative – in short, to be damned.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

PENGUINS SERVE NOTICE

Minneapolis Star-Tribune, 9 June 2017.

The beast set to rule Dublin

Dublin Gazette, 9 Nov 2017.

CATERPILLAR HIT BY WEAK DEMAND

Times, 25 July 2019.

Giant orange slugs invade Moscow

<i> 31 July 2019.

COCKATOOS IN SYDNEY LEARN HOW TO OPEN WHEELIE BINS

Guardian, 3 Sept 2019.

'Growling pig' turns out to be traffic noise

<i> 5 July 2019.

WHITE LION NO LONGER WHITE ELEPHANT AFTER MAJOR REVAMP

Welwyn & Hatfield Times, 11 Sept 2019.

SIDELINES...

HOLY TOAD

The starry night harlequin toad, considered sacred by Colombian indigenous people, was believed to be extinct; but community leaders recently rediscovered the holy amphibians in mountain streams, and have invited scientists to come and view them. *<i>*, 13 Dec 2019.

GOOD LUCK

Lu Chao, 28, flying for the first time, threw coins into the engine for “good luck” as he boarded an internal flight at Anqing Tianzhushan Airport in eastern China in February 2019. The plane was grounded after the coins were found near one of its engines. He was ordered to pay £13,100 compensation to the budget airline – called Lucky Air. *BBC News*, 3 Jan 2020.

SPECIAL POWER

A Queensland trucker was electrocuted by overhead power lines while climbing atop his truck to check a load of cattle, suffering brain trauma, neck and shoulder injury, burns and scarring to his scalp, feet, mouth and airways. He also had to have two toes amputated. But Rodney Stevens, 44, later found he had also developed magnetism in his fingers, with the ability to pick up a set of spoons. *Sunday Mail (Queensland)*, 15 Dec 2019.

ARM AND THE MAN

When Canadian Mark Holmgren had his arm amputated, he didn't like the idea of it being thrown away, so he had the severed limb cleaned, mounted, stuffed and preserved – after which he hung it on a wall inside his house. *D.Mirror*, 4 Jan 2020.



MARTIN ROSS

FOSSIL FINDS | World's oldest trees, piscine asteroid casualties, and a fake Chinese spider...



CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

ABOVE: One of the *Archaeopteris* tree root systems at a quarry in Cairo, New York. The rocks were put in place by local officials to protect the fossils from vehicles. **BELOW:** Fossil fish discovered in North Dakota may provide evidence of an asteroid collision.

The earliest known fossilised trees, some 386 million years old, have been found at an abandoned quarry in Cairo, New York. They are thought to have been part of a forest so vast that it originally stretched to Pennsylvania. These latest finds are believed to be two or three million years older than those of Gilboa, also in New York State, previously thought to be the world's oldest trees. The findings throw new light on tree evolution. Over 3,000m² (32,300ft²) of forest have already been mapped; home to at least two types of trees: *Cladoxylopsids* and *Archaeopteris*. A third tree remains unidentified.

Palaeobotanist Dr Chris Berry from Cardiff University and co-author of the study published in *Current Biology*, says: “This is the oldest place where you can wander around and map out where fossil trees were standing back in the middle part of the Devonian era... It's a very ancient forest from the beginnings of the time where the planet was turning green and forests were becoming a normal part of the Earth's system”.

It is believed that the forest was wiped out by a flood; fish fossils have been found on the quarry's surface. These primæval

Sturgeon choked to death on glassy particles from a fireball

trees mark a transition between a planet with no forests to a planet largely covered with forest. Prof Howard Falcon-Lang of Royal Holloway, University of London, says there's no doubt this is the earliest fossilised forest we know of to date: “It may well be that in the future, something even older pops up – palaeontology is full of surprises!”

- Another significant find in 2019 took place at a fossil site in

North Dakota, which, researchers believe, provides evidence for the mayhem and destruction following an asteroid's collision with the Earth around 66 million years ago. The impact, which took place near the Mexican town of Chicxulub on the Yucatán Peninsula, triggered a huge earthquake which, it has long been hypothesised, was responsible for the dinosaurs' demise.

Palaeontologist Robert DePalma, one of the authors of a report published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, says the research team discovered a chaotic mess of fossils, including those of freshwater sturgeon that apparently choked to death on glassy particles from a fireball that followed the asteroid



ROBERT DEPALMA / UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS



impact. Fossilised dinosaurs, pterosaurs and even feathers at the site have been identified. Because so few dinosaur fossils from the period just prior to the impact have hitherto been found, some scientists have proposed that they were already dying out anyway. Dinosaur fossils at the North Dakota site would provide more evidence that asteroid impact was to blame.

- More recent fossils discovered in a Philippine cave are indicative of a previously unknown hominid species that lived on the island of Luzon over 50,000 years ago. *Homo luzonensis*, the proposed name for the new species, lived around the same time as the small ‘hobbit’ hominids on the Indonesian island of Flores [FT252:18-19]. Whilst the size and shape of some of these fossils are a match for those of known *Homo* species, researchers say the combination of features is unique. If confirmed, *H. luzonensis* would be the latest addition to the human evolutionary family tree, and would also suggest there were several *Homo* groups already living on East Asian and South East Asian islands by the time humans reached southern China – which complicates extant theories of hominid evolution in Asia.

- Meanwhile, at Dalian Natural History Museum in China, scientists were amazed to see a fossil supposedly unearthed in the Lower Cretaceous Yixian Formation. It was an eight-legged creature, very well preserved. They described it as a new species of spider, naming it *Mongolarachne chaoyangensis*. Unfortunately, the fossil was a fake. The hoax was uncovered by invertebrate palaeontologist Paul Selden of the University of Kansas. Examining the specimen, he quickly realised that something was wrong: “It clearly wasn’t a spider... It was missing various parts, had too many segments in its six legs, and huge eyes”. All became clear when palaeobiologist Chungkun Shih of Beijing’s Capital Normal University commented that many Cretaceous crayfish have been found in the same Yixian formation, dating back to around



ABOVE: *Mongolarachne chaoyangensis* – the fossil spider that turned out to be a hoax. BELOW: The ichthyosaur found by a dogwalker on a Somerset beach.

120 to 130 million years ago. Selden said he then realised that what he was looking at was “a very badly preserved crayfish onto which someone had painted on some legs”. Fluorescence microscopy analysis confirmed his suspicions. “These things are dug up by local farmers mostly”, explained Selden, “and they see what money they can get for them. They obviously picked up this thing and thought, ‘Well, you know, it looks a bit like a spider’. And so, they thought they’d paint on some legs”.

Of course, the history of palaeontology is rife with hoaxes. Piltdown Man aside, a 2010 investigation by *Science* journal found a profusion of fake fossils in Chinese museums. The online marketplace, too, is overrun with very clever fakes. “I’ve seen lots of forgeries, and in fact I’ve even been taken in by fossils in a very dark room in Brazil”, says Selden. “It looks interesting until you get to it in the daylight the next day and realise it’s been enhanced, let’s say, for sale”. *sciencenews.org*, 18 Dec; *BBC*

News, 19 Dec; *sciencealert.com*, 20 Dec 2019.

- A dog walker claims he discovered a 65 million-year-old skeleton on a Somerset beach after his dog sniffed it out. Jon Gopsill, 54, was walking his two dogs on the coast near Stolford, Somerset, when he stumbled upon the 5.5ft (1.7m) long fossil, exposed by recent storms. The fossil ichthyosaur (a porpoise-like sea mammal) is thought to date from the Jurassic period. Mr Gopsill, an amateur archaeologist, says he often goes beach walking at low tide with his dogs, and has previously found several ammonites. He has reported his findings to Somerset Heritage and to the Natural History Museum. West Somerset’s northerly bays are known for their Jurassic and Triassic fossil finds. In 2018, part of an 85ft (26m) ichthyosaur’s lower jaw, believed to be 235 to 200 million years old, was found in the Somerset village of Lilstock. *telegraph.co.uk*, 16 Dec 2019.



SIDELINES...

COW FREEDOM

A Polish farmer attempting to coax a cow onto a lorry bound for the slaughterhouse was defeated when the animal made a dash for freedom, swimming across nearby Lake Nysa to take refuge on an island. After a week trying to recapture it, the farmer relented and left food for the cow. A local politician declared that the ‘hero cow’ deserved to live out its days in peace, offering to pay for its upkeep – but after three weeks of freedom, the cow died from stress after being recaptured and sedated. *19 Feb; newshub.co.nz*, 26 Feb 2018.

ESSEX TURTLE

A leatherback turtle was found washed up in Mundon Creek, just off the River Blackwater, Essex, in December 2019. A patrol from South Woodham coastguard found the body after receiving calls from the public. The animal weighed about a quarter of a tonne (250kg) and was sent to London’s Natural History Museum for examination and preservation. A coastguard spokesman described the sighting as “very unusual” for Essex. *BBC News*, 13 Dec 2019.

SEAL STORMS CASTLE

A three-week-old seal was spotted on Boxing Day trying to clamber into the grounds of Tattershall Castle in Lincolnshire, 15 miles (24km) from the sea. The underweight pup had swum upstream along the river Bain from the North Sea in search of food. The “feisty” pup has been transferred to a wildlife centre where he is enjoying raw fish and soup. *BBC News*, 2 Jan; *D.Mirror*, *Metro*, *D.Star*, 3 Jan 2020.

PUMPED UP

A Florida man is facing charges after he allegedly punched and kicked a petrol pump. According to reports, Hunter Bleich, 24, told deputies his rage was due to an argument he had had with his girlfriend. He was arrested and faces a disorderly conduct charge. *wjctv.com*, 1 Jan 2020.

‘TUMBLEGEDDON’

Troopers in Washington State spent 10 hours digging cars and a truck from a carpet of tumbleweeds which was blocking State Route 240 on New Year’s Eve. *skynews.com*, 6 Jan 2020.



SIDELINES...

GERBIL RESCUE

Derby police were contacted by the RSPCA who explained that a recently imprisoned person had refused to grant access to their home. Armed officers made a forced entry where they found a gerbil, “still alive but very hungry”. *<i> 23 Jan 2019.*

ICE CREAM LICKER

Police are trying to identify a woman who licked a tub of ice cream before putting it back in a supermarket freezer. The suspect, seen outside a branch of Walmart in Lufkin, Texas, faces a charge of tampering with a consumer product, which carries a sentence of between two and 20 years imprisonment, and a fine of up to \$10,000. *<i> 6 July 2019.*

GHOSTLY DRIVER

A Romanian court has ruled that a dead man should have his driving license returned, after a ban for speeding was challenged on appeal and overturned. The court, in the city of Iasi, also decreed that a fine paid by the late Mr Valerian Vasiliu should be reimbursed. *<i> 6 July 2019.*

ASH RAMP MEMORIAL

Authorities have closed a homemade skate ramp at an Albuquerque leisure park; it had been partially constructed from the ashes of a man shot and killed at the site. New Mexico state officials announced that access to the memorial ramp had been closed since it had been built without the necessary planning permission. *<i> 6 July 2019.*



WHITE VAN PANIC

Rumours of sex traffickers on wheels cause online hysteria



ABOVE: Baltimore Mayor Bernard ‘Jack’ Young issued a warning about the white vans in a television interview.

A recent ‘white van’ scare in the USA is a salutary example of how unsubstantiated rumours may be widely and rapidly disseminated via the Internet. Urban legends and mass panics have been given a new lease of life as a result of social media. Facebook was the tool in this particular case, spreading a baseless story that men driving white vans were criss-crossing the US to kidnap women for sex trafficking, and to sell their body parts. The tale had spread to such an extent that the mayor of Baltimore issued a warning. “Don’t park near a white van,” said Mayor Bernard ‘Jack’ Young in a TV interview. “Make sure you keep your cellphone in case somebody tries to abduct you.”

Admitting that Baltimore police hadn’t notified him of any threat, the Mayor said it was “all over Facebook.” In response, Baltimore Police Department stated that while the department was aware of social media posts, it hadn’t received “any reports of actual incidents.” And in an attempt to prevent further panic, Georgia police officials issued a statement asking the public to call 911 instead of posting to social media if they wished to report a suspicious white van.

Although no hard evidence has been presented, unconfirmed reports of

“suspicious” white vans have been posted on Facebook thousands of times, and potentially viewed by millions. Baltimore resident Saundra Murray posted photos of a white van outside a petrol station to Instagram on 13 November 2019, writing that the two men in the van had been staring at her constantly. Questioned by *CNN Business* journalists, she explained that she hadn’t reported the incident to police “because I didn’t have much information to report but I did want to make the post to let people know what is going on”. Her post received 3,200 ‘likes’.

Four days later, another Baltimore woman posted screenshots of Murray’s Instagram post to Facebook. The ensuing post was shared over 2,000 times. The following day, a separate Facebook post by a third Baltimore woman was shared more than 5,000 times. It depicted a stock image of a white van with the warning: “When you come out into the mall parking lot, and you see a van like this parked next to your car, DO NOT GO TO YOUR CAR.” The post went on to claim that sex traffickers had “these vans rigged where they lock from the outside, and, once inside, you can’t get out.” Meanwhile, on 15 November, a South Carolina man had posted

a photo of a white van with two external locks to his Facebook timeline, with the following message: “IF U SEE ANY VANS LIKE THIS CALL 911 THIS IS UTILIZED FOR SEX TRAFFICKING”. His post was shared over 151,000 times.

Although this scare was unfolding in November 2019, similar rumours have circulated for several years. A woman posted in 2016 warning of a white van outside her home, adding that people should be careful because there was “a guy in a white van kidnapping kids.” When contacted by reporters, the woman admitted she had no specific evidence for her claim, but that she had heard it “plenty of times” and was only trying to warn friends with children. Previous posts containing unsubstantiated stories are taken as evidence to support further posts with equally baseless claims. Thus, such rumours are effectively self-replicating, and in this sense, the term ‘viral’ is an entirely appropriate one.

At least one driver has been subjected to abuse as a result of the panic. A Detroit home improvement specialist says he was harassed while driving a white van in late November, exactly when Internet speculations were rife. *msn.com*, *CNN Business*, 5 Dec 2019.



BIRDS BEHAVING ODDLY | Crow vandalism and altruistic parrots



JAMES LINSSELL-CLARK / SWNS

ABOVE: George the crow in action. The corvid vandal has been spotted repeatedly damaging cars around Braintree in Essex.

HOOLIGAN CROW

A crow named George has been spotted vandalising around 20 vehicles in an office car park at Braintree, Essex. The delinquent bird has stolen numerous windscreen wipers and is also believed to have damaged cars at a nearby shopping centre. An RSPB expert suggested the hooliganism is caused by the angry corvid seeing its own reflection in car windscreens, then attacking the 'other' bird. *Metro*, 22 Jan 2020.

A KINDNESS OF PARROTS

Altruistic acts, like protecting kin or sheltering strangers, have been observed in orangutans and bonobos, but were thought to be restricted to the great apes. A recent study undertaken by researchers from the Universities of Fife, Scotland, and Berne, Switzerland showed that rats will assist each other, but only if another rat has helped out first, in a *quid pro quo* form of co-operation. However, scientists now believe they have found evidence of nonmammal altruism. In a study of several bird species known for their

intelligence, African grey parrots appeared to display kindness and sharing with their fellows, unlike crows and blue-headed macaws.

Animal cognition researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology's Comparative Cognition research station tested four pairs of parrots and three pairs of macaws. They gave one bird a token, which could be exchanged for a nut reward. When a bird was given a token but didn't have access to a researcher or to the reward, it could reach its partner through a small window, and the partner could then exchange the token for a nut.

In both macaws and parrots, the bird lacking the token often uttered soft cries to get their partner's attention. But where the macaws ignored the partner's cries, the parrots seemed to know that help was needed, even when a reward wasn't forthcoming. Seven out of eight parrots gave tokens to their partners, and when the roles were reversed, the new donors generously passed their tokens to their former helpers, implying some understanding of reciprocity.

What's more, the parrots

assisted their partners regardless of whether the partner was a close friend or relative, or not. If it was, the donor bird gave even more tokens. By contrast, some macaws clearly didn't want a partner at all. Given an opportunity to eat from a shared bowl, the dominant bird grabbed the bowl with its beak and dragged it away.

The researchers hypothesise that the difference between the two species' responses may be due to their respective social organisations. African grey parrots live in large, ever-changing flocks, while blue-headed macaws live in smaller groups.

It may be that the parrots were inclined to share because some of them were not only friends, but siblings with shared genes. In such cases, they would have been "helping themselves via helping each other", which behaviour has been observed in the wild. But the fact of parrots aiding a partner who was neither a friend nor a sibling seems to suggest something more akin to human-like altruism and selflessness. *sciencemag.org*, 9 Jan; *D.Telegraph*, 10+16 Jan 2020.

SIDELINES...

OUT WITH A BANG

A 68-year-old man was denied his final wish when authorities refused permission for his ashes to be used in a firework display. Derbyshire Dales Council said Mick Finnikin's ashes might land in people's gardens. Mr Finnikin, from Ashbourne, Derbyshire, died of a heart attack in 2018. *<i> 25 Jan 2019.*

KRAFTY PRANK

After two cars and a house were covered in cheese slices in the borough of Girard, Pennsylvania, police arrested a man and two teenage boys, who admitted responsibility and were charged with disorderly conduct. News reports did not say whether a motive for plastering the victims' cars and house with cheese had been established; nor was it stated what type or brand of cheese was used. *<i> 18 Dec 2019.*

POPE BLAMED

A sharp drop in visitor numbers to Dublin Zoo has been attributed to the pontiff's August 2019 visit to Ireland, during which the zoo had to close for three days *<i>, 27 Dec 2019.*

TINY TANKS

Belgian army chiefs bungled a £26 million order for an upgraded fleet of tanks. The 44 new vehicles had a raised floor to protect against landmines, but this unfortunately meant it could only be driven by soldiers shorter than 5ft 7in (120cm) and made "getting in and out very difficult". Belgium has some of the world's tallest people, averaging 5ft 10in (178cm). *Sun*, 21 Dec 2019.



MARTIN ROSS



SIDELINES...

WIND TURBULENCE

A Transavia Airlines plane flying from Dubai to Amsterdam was forced to make an unscheduled landing at Vienna after a passenger refused to stop farting during the flight. Two Dutchmen sitting next to the flatulent flyer asked the man to desist, but he refused, with the ensuing ruckus causing the pilot to make an emergency stop. <i> 20 Feb 2018.

HORSE SENSE

Horses are able to unlock most gate mechanisms, a University of St Andrews study showed. They used teeth, lips and tongues to manipulate bolts and handles, and shoulder power to push open gates. Many broke out to join their stablemates, raid food bins, or just stroll around, but some remained where they were. *Sun, 23 Dec 2019.*

BEAR INCURSION

A resident of Sierra Madre, suburban Los Angeles, was sunning himself in his back garden together with his dog when he was startled at the appearance of a mother bear and her cub, apparently from a nearby forest. The dog tried to attack the cub, and the homeowner then kicked the mother bear to protect his dog. The angry bear then slashed and bit him. Neither man or dog was seriously injured. <i> 12 Jun 2019.

HIGH ON THE HOG

Wild boars destroyed £17,000 worth of cocaine hidden in a forest in Italy's Valdichiana valley and scattered the packages around. Police heard the alleged dealers complaining about the boars whilst listening in on a bugged phone call. Three Albanians and an Italian were arrested. The gang allegedly traded 4.4lb (2kg) of cocaine every month in nightclubs in the city of Arezzo. *metro.co.uk, 15 Nov 2019.*

KIDNEY GONE

Dave Whatley, 53, had a kidney that weighed more than a bowling ball removed. Surgeons extracted the 21lb (9.5kg) organ in a seven-hour operation. The foot-long kidney had become 120 times larger than normal because of polycystic kidney disease. After coming round, the first thing Mr Whatley said to his wife was "Anne, I can see my feet!" *Sun, 24 Dec 2019.*

YETI ROW



VISIT NEPAL 2020

ABOVE: The controversial yeti statue being used to promote tourism to Nepal, where people think it looks more like a wrestler.

A series of 7ft (2m) tall statues of the yeti, each costing 500,000 rupees (£3,380), have caused controversy in Nepal, with many of its citizens complaining that the artwork doesn't resemble the actual beast. Over 100 of these statues are to be sent around the world, advertising Nepal as a tourist destination. "This is not right. The government can't just do as it wants," said passer-by Reshma Shrestha, as she walked past one of statues. "If you did not tell me, I would not have known that it was a yeti. What I know about the yeti is that it is a monkey-like creature which walks around in snow."

The statues, bearing the words 'Visit Nepal', will be placed at Nepalese tourist attractions, trade centres, airports, and some Himalayan base camps. They will also be sent abroad to act as mascots in cities around the world. But yeti expert Ram Kumar Pandey points out that, traditionally, the yeti is described in folk tales as a big monkey-like creature, whereas this new depiction resembles "a sumo wrestler". Another critic, Krishna Lama, echoed his comments: "It looks like a wrestler – not a yeti."

Defending its decision, the Yeti Art Committee co-coordinator, Prem Prabhat

Gurung, argued that because the yeti is a mythical character, creative licence is valid: "Our aim is to produce the yeti as an emblem of peace, reconciliation and humility rather than a fear-creating feature." And the artist responsible for creating the statues, Ang Tsherin Sherpa, said: "I did not make yeti's sketch by reading any book. On the basis of stories that I heard in my childhood, and having Lord Buddha at the back of my mind, I made the design." He added that he had chosen not to depict his yetis as furry, in order "to make it easier to paint". *BBC News, 28 Jan 2020.*

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PAUL SIEVEKING discovers the world's oldest stoners and some cute prehistoric baby bottles

HIGH TIMES BEGIN

The earliest known evidence of cannabis for altering perception – at least 2,500 years ago – has been uncovered from tombs in western China. Today, more than 150 million people regularly smoke cannabis, making it one of the world's most popular recreational drugs. Traces of the plant were identified in 10 wooden burners or braziers at Jirzankal Cemetery, 3,000m (10,000ft) up in the Pamir Mountains. It had high levels of the psychoactive compound tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), suggesting people at the time were well aware of its psychoactive effects. Excavations have uncovered skeletons and wooden plates and bowls. All are typical of the Sogdians, a people of western China and Tajikistan who generally followed the Persian faith of Zoroastrianism, which later celebrated the mind-expanding properties of cannabis in sacred texts. At Jirzankal, glass beads typical of Western Asia and silk from China confirm the long-distance trade for which the Sogdians became famous, and isotopic analysis of 34 skeletons showed that nearly a third were migrants.

Cannabis evolved about 28 million years ago on the eastern Tibetan Plateau, according to a pollen study published last May. A close relative of the common hop found in beer, the plant still grows wild across Central Asia. More than 4,000 years ago, Chinese farmers began to grow it for oil and for fibre to make rope, clothing and paper. (The word 'canvas' derives from 'cannabis'). The early cultivated varieties, as well as most wild populations, had low levels of THC and other psychoactive compounds.

The international team excavating Jirzankal, led by Yang Yimin and Ren Meng



ABOVE: Traces of cannabis were found in these 2,500-year-old wooden braziers from tombs in Western China.

of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing, thinks the Sogdians were deliberately breeding plants with higher levels of THC and burning them as part of funerary rituals. They were apparently burned in an enclosed space, so mourners almost certainly inhaled THC-laced fumes. It's the earliest clear evidence of cannabis being used for its psychoactive properties. However, Megan Cifarelli, an art historian at Manhattanville College in Purchase, New York, who has studied ancient drug use, notes the aromatic fumes might also have been used to mask the smell of a putrefying corpse.

The Jirzankal excavators think cannabis use was restricted to elites until potent dope began to spread across Central Asia through the Silk Road linking China with Iran. In 440 BC, Herodotus wrote that the nomadic Scythians, who controlled vast areas from Siberia to Eastern Europe, made tents and heated rocks in order to inhale hemp vapours that made them "shout for joy". And in 2013 an archaeologist in Stavropol, Russia,

excavated a nearby 2400-year-old Scythian tomb that held gold vessels bearing residues of both opium and cannabis, supporting the idea that elites used the drug first. Ancient artwork and textual references from Syria to China hint at even earlier cannabis drug use, and the new analytical methods could soon provide concrete evidence of this.

The Jirzankal findings, published in *Science Advances* last June, tally with other early evidence for the presence of cannabis from burials further north, in the Xinjiang region of China and in the Altai Mountains of Russia. *sciencemag.org*, 12 June; *BBC News*, *Guardian*, 13 June; *NY Times*, 14 June 2019. For complete cannabis plants in a Chinese tomb from 400-800 BC, see **FT348:12**.

RUINS RE-EMERGE

Dramatic ruins from the Mitanni Empire emerged briefly from a reservoir in Iraqi Kurdistan. The site extends for a kilometre, and features several grand houses, a palace, an extensive road network and a cemetery. The palace stood on an elevated terrace above the valley, only 65ft (20m) from what was then the eastern bank of the Tigris River. The walls were made of mud bricks up to 6ft (1.8m) thick. At its height, the Indo-Iranian Mitanni empire extended from Kirkuk (ancient Arrapkha) and the Zagros Mountains in the east through Assyria to the Mediterranean in the west. The last independent king was Tushratta (died c. 1360 BC), under whose reign Wassukkani, the capital, was sacked by the Hittites.

The site was first noticed in 2010 after water levels dropped precipitously. A lack of rain and the release of water through the Mosul Dam to relieve dry conditions led to it being revealed. It had been flooded when a dam was built in the mid-1980s before archaeologists were able to examine it. They have now discovered several rooms, inscribed clay tablets and wall paintings. Cuneiform writing on one of the tablets indicated the palace site, called Kemune,



ABOVE: These Mitanni Empire ruins were revealed when water levels dropped in a reservoir in Iraqi Kurdistan.

dates to the Middle Bronze Age, about 1800 BC. The ruins have now been submerged again. It is only the second site in the region where wall paintings of the Mitanni period have been discovered.

“We have found remains of wall paintings in bright shades of red and blue,” said Ivana Puljiz of the Tübingen Institute for Ancient Near Eastern Studies. “In the second millennium BC, murals were probably a typical feature of palaces in the Ancient Near East, but we rarely find them preserved, so discovering wall paintings in Kemune is an archaeological sensation. The Mitanni Empire is one of the least researched empires of the Ancient Near East. Information on palaces of the Mitanni period is so far only available from Tell Brak in Syria and from the cities of Nuzi and Alalakh, both located on the periphery of the empire. Even the capital of the Mitanni Empire has not been identified beyond doubt.” Examination of one of the tablets suggests Kemune is probably the ancient city of Zakhiku, mentioned in one ancient source. It is hoped that future text finds will show whether this identification is correct. *Sky News*, 29 June; *dailymail.co.uk*, 30 June 2019.

AGE OF THE CHICKEN

A study of chicken bones dug up at London archaeological sites shows how the bird we know today has altered beyond recognition from its ancestors. With around 23 billion chickens on the planet at any one time, the bird is a symbol of the way we are shaping the environment. There are at least 10 times more chickens than any other bird and their combined mass is greater than that of all other birds on Earth. (The second most numerous bird on the planet, with an estimated population of 1.5 billion, is a small creature known as the red-billed quelea or “feathered locust” from sub-Saharan Africa.)

“You could say we are living in the planet of the chickens,” said Dr Carys Bennett, a geologist at the University of Leicester, who led the study, published in the journal *Royal Society Open Science*. “As the most numerous terrestrial vertebrate species on the planet, with a biology shaped by humans, modern chickens are a symbol of our changed biosphere.” She said when future generations examine rocks from our time, they will probably see “tin cans, glass bottles, and bits of material that were once plastic, and amongst that will be bones of chickens”. Domesticated animals now make up the majority of animal species on land, shaping the natural world. The number of chickens slaughtered in 2014 was 65.8 billion – compared to a mere 1.5 billion pigs and 0.3 billion cattle.

The domestic chicken is descended



ABOVE: Prehistoric baby bottles in the shapes of animals found in children's graves in Bavaria.

from the red jungle fowl, which is native to tropical Southeast Asia. The bird was first domesticated around 8,000 years ago, and rapidly spread around the world, to be used for meat and eggs. In the 1950s the “chicken-of-tomorrow programme” was launched to produce bigger birds. Since then, the bird has undergone extraordinary changes. It has been selectively bred to put on weight fast, which is evident from its body and the chemistry and genetics of its bones. The modern broiler chicken, with an average life until slaughter of five to nine weeks, has five times the mass of its ancestor. Meanwhile, roast chicken has gone from being an occasional treat to a global food enterprise. *BBC News*, 12 Dec 2018.

FIRST BABY BOTTLES

Prehistoric mothers gave their infants clay baby bottles crafted into the shape of little animals with feet, showing they “lavished their children with love and attention”, according to lead researcher Dr Julie Dunne from the University of Bristol. Vessels with teat-shaped spouts found in three children's graves in Bavaria, one dating to 1200 BC, contain chemical markers of dairy fats from the fresh milk of animals such as cows or goats. Pig or possibly human milk may have been mixed with the contents of one vessel. Milk from domesticated creatures could have supplemented but not totally replaced the nutritional value of mothers' milk as infants were removed from breastfeeding.

Two of the graves where the vessels were found date to between around 2,800 and 2,450 years ago. The third dates to between about 3,200 and 2,800 year ago. Two of the infants died at around age one or two; the other might have been as old as six. Similar clay vessels with spouts, some of which are animal-shaped, date to as

early as 7,500 years ago in Europe. Such finds have been recovered at early farming villages, often in children's graves. Possible uses of these objects, for feeding babies or perhaps elderly or sick adults, were previously unclear. *Nature*, *sciencenews.org*, 25 Sept; *Irish Independent*, 26 Sept 2019.

DETECTORIST DOLDRUMS

Shredded aluminium and hypodermic needles are disrupting signals picked up by metal detectors on farmland and commons. Detectorist William Hargeaves said: “A lot of it is clinical waste – aluminium, cans that look like they've been through a shredder, all sorts of metal bits. You won't find anything now. As soon as you get in a field, the detector goes berserk”. He claims that contamination in fields is caused by poorly processed compost, and that much buried treasure will now never be found. *D.Telegraph*, 9 Jan 2020.

BRONZE AGE TAPEWORMS

Prosperous Bronze Age Britons were infested with an array of parasitic worms, which they probably picked up by eating raw fish and frogs. Archaeologists excavating the Must Farm site in East Anglia – the well-preserved remains of a marsh settlement destroyed by fire 3,000 years ago – found a number of human coprolites buried in the mud that surrounded the stilted roundhouses. These proved to be full of parasite eggs, including those of fish tapeworms, *Echinostoma* and giant kidney worms. Fish tapeworms are particularly unpleasant: coiled in the intestine, they can grow up to 10m (33ft) in length. They probably made the lives of ancient Britons fairly unpleasant; and their incidence has been on the rise again in recent years, thanks to the popularity of sushi and ceviche. *The Week*, 31 Aug 2019.



Triggered in Whispers Estate

ALAN MURDIE looks at findings from a new scientific investigation of a notoriously haunted house

The celebrated British ghost hunter Peter Underwood (1923-2014) once sagely remarked, “Ghosts are always news” (in his autobiography *No Common Task*, 1983).

This is very true, and for me, the most surprising piece of ghost news of the last year came with the appearance of a technical paper published in *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* in October 2019. It detailed the interesting results of a scientific investigation of a notoriously haunted house known as the Whispers Estate in Mitchell, Indiana.

If you have missed this paper, don't worry. Its less than eye-catching title ‘Concomitant Object Movements and EMF Spikes At A Purported Haunt’ inevitably meant it was unlikely to be picked by the wider media. However, what surprised me was not the positive findings obtained during a well-conducted vigil held at the Whispers Estate in July 2016, but the identity of one of the two authors concerned. This is Dr James Houran, a distinguished academic psychiatrist, who along with Brian Laythe details a series of instrumental recordings of fluctuations in electromagnetic fields and the movement of target objects (two partly inflated beach balls) inside the property, which they cannot explain (in *Journal of the SPR* vol.83. no.4, 212-229).

These results would have pleased Peter Underwood, who would have seen them as a vindication of his longstanding championing of the use ‘trigger objects’ in investigations long ago.

Trigger objects were ones Underwood and early ghost hunters would ring with chalk at the start of vigils and then check periodically to see if any movement had occurred. Frequently selected were objects previously reported as moving by themselves. Alternatively, investigators introduced their own test objects, often items invested with emotional or symbolic significance like crucifixes, small toys or ornaments – although Underwood's placing of paper and pencils around Langenhoe Church in Essex during an overnight investigation in September 1949, in the hope an entity might write him a message, was a triumph of optimism over expectation. In the event, his hopes for a successful vigil were ruined by a crashing thunderstorm.

In their article, Laythe and Houran announce successes in observing

movements by the beach balls under controlled conditions, although they hesitate to declare a ghost being at work.

From a phenomenal point of view, such results are not a surprise for me, given the wealth of reports and claims of curious object movements logged at many haunted premises worldwide. Rather, I was interested in this report being endorsed by Dr James Houran, a psychiatrist and distinguished academic interested in psychical matters, whom 20 years ago I had considered to be very much on the sceptical side. This was on account of the scholarly book on ghostly experiences he edited in 2001.

But firstly, the intriguing results at the Whispers Estate, a reputedly haunted Victorian-era house dating from around 1894: there are numerous tales of it being haunted by the spirit of a female child called ‘Rachael’, rumoured to have perished in a fire in the early 1900s.

‘Rachael’ is blamed for apparitions, odd touching sensations experienced by visitors and object movements, with her speciality being heard singing ‘Ring around the rosie’ in the front parlour. The fact that ‘Rachael’ chooses an Americanised nursery rhyme is perhaps a little predictable; one thinks of occasional

spooky TV plays and dramas over the years where snatches of childish singing and nursery rhymes have been played to eerie effect. Judging by reports, singing ghosts generally confine themselves to antique and traditional songs; we do not seem to have accounts of prematurely deceased children and teenagers of the last 60 years returning to whistle, hum or sing numbers selected from contemporary pop charts (thus the afterlife may prove a more serious and merciful place than often conceived).

Generally, ‘Rachael’ seems a fairly harmless presence, aside from one or two instances of people complaining of being roughly handled. This has not stopped the Whispers Estate being sensationalised in the media and labelled as the ‘4th Most Terrifying Place in America’ on the Travel Channel in October 2010. If one believes what one reads online, the property is a spectre-ridden dwelling entirely given over to the powers of darkness where no one would wish to set foot, except on the numerous commercial tours and ghost hunts held at the site over the years.

Bearing in mind this existing reputation and as a precaution against fraud, Laythe inspected the Whispers Estate a number of times before the investigation described,



ABOVE: The “terrifying” Whispers Estate house in Mitchell, Indiana.

looking out for indications of chicanery and hoaxing that had been alleged by members of the Centre for Inquiry and visitors who had been disappointed or sceptical concerning the alleged phenomena.

Laythe discovered no evidence to confirm the existence, past or present, of 'Rachael'; but he was satisfied that at least some manifestations were credible, meriting further investigation. These included the unexplained movements of a beach ball, the displacement of a measuring instrument and 'audible moans', together with two cases of individuals complaining of violent physical touching.

This led to the study undertaken on 16 July 2016 by a well-equipped team of eight comprising members of the 'investigative branch' of the Institute for the Study of Religious and Anomalous Experience (ISRAE). Setting up a collection of sensors and 14 cameras, this team monitored the property under strict conditions, so far as these could be imposed.

In light of the reported findings, I would very much like to go there myself. Although presented in the technical and plodding style of so much academic writing, findings reported include apparently psychokinetic events with the two beach balls used as trigger objects, being placed on a bed in what is dubbed 'Rachael's Room'. On 10 occasions, the balls were recorded moving by themselves, falling or dropping off the end of the bed board. The team was unable to find any cause or explanation, the movements occurring both spontaneously and at the direct request of the team members, "paralleling so-called responsive phenomena" in poltergeist cases and physical séances in the past.

Additionally, unexplained changes in electromagnetic fields registered upon an EMF meter led the authors to tentatively conclude that "a pattern exists here, whereby small EMF fields are being measured contrary to what physics and local sources would seem to theoretically allow."

This endorsement of objective phenomena contrasts very much with the overall impression conveyed in the book that Houran edited, *Hauntings and Poltergeists: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (2001). This sober-titled work carried a collection of essays from academics and professionals in different fields, mostly leaning in a sceptical direction. The book anticipated the riddle of ghost experiences being eventually solved by existing scientific models, especially from neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and anomalous psychology (a discipline then coming into its own).

Most sceptical of all was the essay



ABOVE: Rachael's room in Whispers Estate, where various phenomena have been observed.

There were unexplained movements of a beach ball and cases of violent physical touching

by Peter Brugger, a neurophysiologist: 'From haunted brain to haunted science: A cognitive neuroscience view of paranormal and pseudoscientific thought'. Brugger proposed "poltergeists are of the body" and that manifestations were misperceptions generated by faulty nerves, which disrupt cognitive processes. He argued organic nervous disorders lead to "extreme distractibility, over-inclusive perception, overestimation of the meaningfulness of naturally occurring coincidences, delusional ideation, and highly disordered thought and language, all of which represent core symptoms of schizophrenia." Victims suffering these become deluded into thinking their homes are haunted.

What Brugger was lacking was any actual studies of contemporary cases to confirm this. So instead he turned to the case of Swedish poet August Strindberg (1849-1912), who suffered a mental breakdown in the years leading up to 1908, during which he was convinced he was haunted by his estranged wife, Harriet, who could 'possess' him even from 100 miles away. In bouts of lunacy, he believed he was tormented by an entity administering electric shocks. (See *Inferno: From an Occult Diary*).

Frankly, any responsible investigator faced with a single witness like Strindberg

today would wisely consider the possible need for medical or psychological assistance or evaluation for the witness, before exploring psychical possibilities too deeply, unless some independent or corroborating evidence was also available.

But more pertinently, Brugger's diagnosis of symptoms claimed by Strindberg was based on broad-brush suppositions about possible conditions the troubled poet *might* have been suffering over 90 years earlier but on which there could be no certainty.

Obviously, Brugger never examined Strindberg as a patient. Nor did he present any first-hand clinical opinions from any physician attending Strindberg at the time, though inevitably such a record would have been restricted by the more limited medical knowledge of the period. Brugger's diagnosis rested largely on the rambling diary of the poet himself viewed through the remote prism of modern neuroscience. That Strindberg exaggerated for literary effect or may have taken narcotics when he wrote were possibilities left unexplored.

More problematic for Brugger's model are multi-witness cases that cannot be explained on the basis of neurophysiological disorders affecting the brain or body of a single witness. To overcome this obstacle, Brugger proposed a hypothesis of shared delusions breezily stating: "The accounts that more than one person witnessed a poltergeist phenomenon [...] do not buttress the objectivity of a spooky percept". He declared: "Shared delusions are commonplace in the records of psychiatry" – with 'folie à deux' or Lasègue-Falret Syndrome being fingered.

No actual examples from poltergeist



GHOSTWATCH

literature were cited out of the hundreds on record, but from Brugger's perspective people transmit delusions to each other rather like colds or 'flu. Again, no examples were explored; in actuality witnesses often diverge widely as to the nature of their experiences.

Altogether, I think that James Houran was not wholly convinced by purely physiological and psychological explanations, recognising they may crumble in the face of instrumental data and evidence. Poltergeist effects can leave registerable traces. As researcher Karlis Osis once commented, no psychiatrist has reported an hallucination by a patient that could open the windows of a psychiatric ward (though a psychiatrist might well be embarrassed about recording such an incident). When an object moves or is broken, a sound is recorded on tape or a fire breaks out, a physical event is occurring. Accordingly, over the last 20 years, Houran has expanded his scope, engaging in practical field research generating a substantial bibliography of published academic work concerning paranormal experiences to his name.

For their own part, Laythe and Houran's ideas expressed in their 2019 paper remain resolutely earthbound, recognising a range of possible options when seeking explanations for 'localised energetic anomalies' discovered at the Whispers Estate. Electromagnetism is identified as a possible direction of travel, rather than embracing ideas of spirit intervention. The authors state: "We do not have an immediately preferred hypothesis... our aim is to promote model-building versus theory-formation per se." But they acknowledge the phenomena as possible instances of psychokinesis, rather than the work of a discarnate entity.

The need for a tighter scientific approach and some adherence to basic standards of measurement is one which the SPR itself is promoting in a specialist booklet, *Guidance Notes for Investigators of Spontaneous Cases* by Steven T Parsons, issued in autumn 2018. Appearing within a blue cover in a nod to Harry Price's blue-covered book of instructions issued to ghost hunters at Borley Rectory in 1937, it is otherwise a wholly up-to-date work to suit ghost hunting in the 21st century. It emphasises that there are internationally recognised standards of measurement to which ghost



LEFT: August Strindberg, whose mental breakdown led him to experience various kinds of seemingly supernatural disturbance. **BELOW:** The SPR's up-to-date guide for 21st century ghost hunters.

Such reactions tell us more about a particular mind-set; some minds are utterly incapable of shifting fixed opinions once formed. Even if effects reported by the ISRAE team were to be reported 1,000 times, there would be those who would maintain a resolute resistance, fearful that they might be compelled to accept some 'spooky precept' or antiquated absurdity.

Others will prefer to generate a cascade of doubtful and disagreeable questions, instead of examining and acknowledging that facts could be emerging which advance the cause of science. And there will be some who insist that such results must simply be plain wrong without demonstrating why or how, excusing themselves from scrutinising reports altogether with soundbites doomed to be

everlastingly repeated (e.g. "extraordinary events require extraordinary evidence" etc). The danger is that these get repeated to the point that the scientific technique is itself brought into disgrace and disrepute by such monotonous repetition and prejudicial avoidance.

At the same time, one must not be dazzled by positive findings or risk veering to the opposite polarity and embracing every ghostly theory or belief that has ever done the rounds; proper science is not about winning converts but developing testable hypotheses and theories. In particular, I do not think we should abandon looking at the neurophysiological angles in assessing such reports.

For there does exist a body of data suggesting that objective PK events may correspond with particular neurological conditions and symptoms displayed by certain persons, and this is a topic that I plan to return to in the next column, my starting point being an observation by a Polish observer of the physical medium DD Home in 1857, who considered: "On the one hand I am convinced, that Hume's [*sic*] sickly organism does possess a force which can act at a distance from that organism, and at that distance it produces strange phenomena." (cited in Z Krasinski, (ed.) *Listy do Konstantego Gaszynskiego* ['Letters to Konstanty Gaszyński'] 1971, transl. Zofia Weaver, 1991).

Guidance Notes for Investigators of Spontaneous Cases

Apparitions, Hauntings, Poltergeists and
Similar Phenomena

New Edition

STEVEN T. PARSONS



hunters should pay proper attention, as well as ensuring they properly understand the range and limits of equipment they may take to haunted sites.

Undoubtedly, some arch-sceptics, or 'skeptics' as they may prefer, will not want to acknowledge such findings or conclusions as Houran and Lyathe report even tentatively, flatly rejecting all positive results from the outset or branding them as being of no significance.



HO-HUM – OR NOT? | Riddle of strange hums is solved – but has the Colorado drone flap been put to bed by the explanation of “mass hysteria”?

MYSTERY HUM SOLVED

In May and June 2018, numerous seismic signals began to be detected by earthquake monitoring agencies all over the world. They created a weird humming sound, with some signals detected in November having a duration of up to 20 minutes. The explanation: the formation of a new underwater volcano. This unusual amount of earthquakes was traced to Mayotte, an island in the Comoros archipelago, located in the Indian Ocean between Africa and Madagascar. Scientists detected 7,000 tectonic earthquakes, which occur when the Earth's tectonic plates become stuck as they move alongside one another. The ensuing pressure when they move on causes earthquakes. The most severe reached a magnitude of 5.9 in May 2018, and scientists also observed 407 long-period seismic signals.

These Very Long Period (VLP) signals are harmonic and low, with a resonance akin to a double bass or a large bell, and the 20- to 30-minute signals could be detected hundreds of miles away. The earthquakes and signals were coming from an area about 22 miles (35km) off the eastern coast of the island. There were no signs of volcanic activity in this area, but it was suspected that magmatic processes might be forming a volcano; indeed, it was established that the signals were emanating from an enormous magma-filled reservoir approximately 20 miles (32km) below the ocean floor. As the magma travelled upwards, it formed the new volcano.

dailystar.co.uk; cnn.com 9 Jan 2020. For recent reports on hums, see FT341:22-23, 371:24-25.

MYSTERY DRONES SOLVED?

Just before Christmas, giant drones measuring up to six feet (1.8m) across were apparently spotted in the night sky over north-eastern Colorado, sometimes in swarms as large as 30. Since then, sightings spanning six counties across Colorado and Nebraska have been recorded.



ABOVE: American television news reports quickly picked up on the “mystery drone” stories, showing video footage of the mysterious lights in the sky.

“They’ve been doing a grid search, a grid pattern,” Phillips County Sheriff Thomas Elliott told the *Denver Post*. “They fly one square and then they fly another square.” However, the sheriff could shed no light on the origin or owner of the drones, which, he said, had been flying over Phillips and Yuma counties every night for a week. Each night, at least 17 drones appear at about 7 o’clock, disappearing around 10 o’clock, and staying around 200 to 300ft (60-90m) above ground. The Federal Aviation Administration, Air Force, Drug Enforcement Administration and US Army Forces Command all said the drones did not belong to their organisations. Since they are flying in uncontrolled airspace, there are no regulations requiring drone operators to identify themselves.

Captain Michael Yowell of the Lincoln County Sheriff’s Office says he has seen the mysterious objects more than once over Hugo, a town with a population of fewer than 800. He described an abnormal red light appearing on the horizon; soon afterwards, a drone buzzes overhead, square, with red lights at its corners and a white light in the middle. They move at a consistent speed of about 45mph (72km/h), a few hundred feet above ground, emitting a low hum and high-pitched whine. “It doesn’t sound like your normal drone,” said Yowell. “It sounds like a motor. It sounds like a

jetliner when you’re standing next to an airport.”

Commercial photographer and drone pilot Vic Moss suggested they might be searching or mapping out the area, adding that drones often flew at night for crop-examination purposes. Alternatively, they might belong to a local drone company testing new technologies. Still another theory involves FE Warren Air Force Base in neighbouring Wyoming, with drones having been spotted in the vicinity. The airbase has around 200 underground silos housing Minuteman nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Eastern Colorado has a low population, being an expanse of rural farmland with few people or industry, so it is difficult to see why the drones (or their operators) would be interested in the region, unless their target was the airbase, which issued the following statement: “We can confirm that the drones spotted in Colorado and Nebraska are not from FE Warren Air Force Base”, adding “we do have counter-drone systems. But we cannot speak to specifics due to operational security.”

Some of the sightings may have been down to a Kansas UFO group. Michael Spicer of Wichita-based ArchAngleRECON told reporters his group had been using drones to track an experimental aircraft known as the TicTac. Spicer admitted the group had sent up flights of between six to 12 drones in for-

mations that could be described as a grid pattern, but, based on reported locations, denied that they could be responsible for all the mystery drones. Although Sheriff Elliott said the drones did not appear to be malicious, the sheriff of neighbouring Yuma County, Todd Combs, observed: “These drones have made residents in our community very nervous and anxious. People do not like the unknown as it upsets the balance of our lives.”

However, on 13 January, the Colorado Department of Public Safety (CDPS) announced the conclusion of their investigation into the mysterious drone sightings. CDPS “confirmed no incidents involving criminal activity, nor have investigations substantiated reports of suspicious or illegal drone activity”; in other words, they found nothing untoward, and are suggesting that the wave of drone reports is attributable to mass hysteria.

Ninety reports from 23 November onward were analysed; none was confirmed as an instance of illegal drone activity. Of 23 reports between 6 January and 13 January, 13 were established to be “planets, stars, or small hobbyist drones”. Six were determined to be commercial aircraft, while four remain unconfirmed. Drone hysteria has previously been documented by drone manufacturer DJI, and an Academy of Model Aeronautics study found only 27 out of 764 drone sighting reports by aircraft pilots were legitimate near misses.

“While I can’t conclusively say we have solved the mystery, we have been able to rule out a lot of the activity that was causing concern,” said Stan Hilkey, CDPS executive director. “We will continue to remain vigilant and respond as new information comes in.”

businessinsider.com, 30 Dec 2019; yahoo.com, 2 Jan; journal-advocate.com, 17 Jan; thedaily-beast.com, 20 Jan; vice.com, 29 Jan 2020. See also FT308:24-25, 321:28, 322:12, 335:20, 371:12.



FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

More 'Satanist' sheep-killers at large, and the search for Somerset Gimp Man continues...

OCCULT CRIME WAVE [FT389:4]



Hampshire Police have made an arrest in connection with a series of sheep killings accompanied by church desecration and 'occult' graffiti in the New Forest area. "A 41-year-old man from Winchester has been arrested on suspicion of six counts of criminal damage," said a police spokesperson. "They relate to the deaths of sheep in Wittensford Lane and Kewlake Lane, Cadnam, and Penn Road, Bramshaw. He remains in custody at this time."

The crime spree has been attributed to Satanists, on account of graffiti depicting inverted crosses and the number '666'. But a letter purporting to have been penned by a member of the Church of Satan and published in local newspaper the *Daily Echo* pointed out that a pentagram spray-painted on a sheep's carcass was "the wrong way around to symbolise Satanism" and that the number 666 held no fears for Satanists, only Christians, who are "superstitiously afraid of this number". The writer claimed it was "extremely rare for Satanists to perform rituals where there is an animal that is slaughtered as a sacrifice (which is normally only performed by extremists)" and that "the animal would have had its throat slit clean and not stab wounds from what sounds like a messy and cruel knife attack". They concluded by saying "as a Satanist myself, I feel that Satanism is a very taboo subject and is often frowned upon as we are misunderstood."

Further sheep deaths were reported in the villages of Bramshaw and Cadnam in January. A ewe was found stabbed to death in the middle of a



ABOVE: St Botolph's has reportedly become known as the 'demon church'.

road, with a broken wooden pitchfork sticking out of it and a straw cross lying nearby.

An abandoned church in Lincolnshire has also been desecrated. The Grade I-listed St Botolph's Church, Skidbrooke, has repeatedly been broken into by intruders, who sacrifice chickens, scrawl occult symbols, and smash tombstones in the graveyard.

Local farmer Martin Chapman, 72, has taken it on himself to clear up after the trespassers, and says he has come into contact with them as they descend on the ruined church on Friday nights. He says the groups are made up mostly of women and that they "bring chickens and slit their throats" so the blood can be sprayed over the walls. "They make rings of candles and salt. They smash graves. There is no fear. There's a group of serious witches that come down," he said.

Among locals, St Botolph's has apparently become known as the 'demon church'. *daily-echo.co.uk*, 2 Dec 2019; *D.Mirror*, 13 Jan; *D.Telegraph*, 23 Jan; *D.Mail*, 13, 26 Jan 2020.

SOMERSET'S GIMP MAN [FT384:24]



Avon and Somerset Constabulary made two arrests after villagers in north Somerset were subjected to several months' harassment by a person or persons dressed in a black latex 'gimp' suit with red crosses over the eyes. On 11 July 2019, a woman in her 20s had been approached by the 'gimp', who was "grunting and breathing heavily". Police, who drafted in sniffer dogs and a helicopter in their hunt, said they had received 14 reports of similar offences in Claverham and Yatton since November 2018. A man aged 28 was arrested on suspicion of indecency offences on 15 July and another man, 34, was arrested the following day. Both were released on police bail due to lack of evidence.

And police in Worcestershire hunting a man who accosted children outside school wearing a pig mask have also made an arrest. Malvern mother Stacey Lee said her 11-year-old daughter Misha, who attends

The Chase School, had filmed the suspect but afterwards became too frightened to walk to school. "He was jumping in front of kids and throwing his arms out," she said. West Mercia Police confirmed that a 55-year-old local man was being held on suspicion of racially aggravated public order offences. The 'gimp suit' was made infamous by a character in Quentin Tarantino's 1994 hit film *Pulp Fiction*. *Bristol Post*, 15 Aug; *N.Somerset Times*, 20 Nov; *D.Telegraph*, 6 Dec; *Sun*, 7 Dec 2019.

OLD FAKE NEWS [FT389:22-23]



An Australian government department created fake horoscopes designed to dissuade Sri Lankans from arriving by boat and seeking asylum there, it has been revealed. The advertising campaign gave negative predictions for each star sign; Arians were warned that people smugglers would "take your money and you will be returned to Sri Lanka with nothing". Sagittarians were advised that "everything you risked to get there [Australia] will be in vain and you will end up owing everyone", while Capricorns were cautioned about facing a "storm of bad luck" once they were returned to Sri Lanka, if, that is, they should survive the "dangerous seas and unpredictable weather". *Guardian*, 19 Dec 2019.

CAT KILLER [FT341:4, 373:18-20, 377:23]



A security guard was charged with 16 counts of criminal damage after nine cats were killed and seven others seriously injured in the Brighton area. Steven Bouquet, 52, was jostled and insulted by



an angry crowd when he appeared in court. He is accused of carrying out the alleged attacks between 2 October 2018 and 1 June 2019. Sussex Police said he was also charged with possessing a knife in public. Under UK legislation, cats and other animals are considered to be property, and a conviction for criminal damage can result in a heavier sentence than animal cruelty. *irishexaminer.com*, 23 Dec 2019.

STARLING APOCALYPSE [FT388:4, 389:26]



Officers from North Wales Police rural crime team investigating the mysterious deaths of over 200 starlings found dead or dying along a 100 metre (109yd) stretch of road and its adjoining hedges on the island of Anglesey say the birds may have collided with the ground after taking evasive action to avoid a bird of prey, and had failed to pull up in time. Initial postmortem reports indicated the starlings had died from severe internal trauma upon impact. While officials say they are still awaiting the results of toxicology tests, they are “quite sure” of the reasons and cause of deaths. “It’s highly likely the murmuration took avoiding action whilst airborne, from possibly a bird of prey, with the rear of the group not pulling up in time and striking the ground,” said a police statement.

And in early March, residents of a Sikeston, a small Missouri town, were perplexed to find over 1,000 dead birds in a nearby field. The carcasses were identified as four bird types: red-winged blackbirds, brown-headed cowbirds, grackles and European starlings. Many showed signs of physical injury. The first bird falls began to be reported at the same time as a thunderstorm moved over the area. It is thought that the flocks had been spooked by the storm’s high winds, lightning and hail. *theguardian.com*, 16 Jan 2020. *D.Mail*, 3 Mar 2020.

FRENCH MINISTER IMPERSONATION [FT384:25]



The trial of seven persons alleged to have impersonated the then French defence minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, in order to con wealthy individuals out of over 50 million euros (£42m) has begun in Paris. The supposed masterminds of the gang are both French-Israelis, Gilbert Chikli, 54, and Anthony Lasarevitsch, 35. Video-calling their targets from a mocked-up version of the minister’s office and wearing a silicone mask of Le Drian, they are accused of contacting over 150 prominent figures and organisations in 2015-2016, including King Philippe of Belgium, Gabonese President Ali Bongo, the CEO of the Lafarge cement company, church leaders and charities. Most did not fall for the hoax, requesting ransom payments to hostage-takers or cash for anti-terror operations. However, the Aga Khan lost 20 million euros, 7.7 million of which could not be recovered. Turkish businessman Inan Kirac allegedly wired over 47 million euros, and Château Margaux vineyards parted with 3 million. Prosecutors say that photos of a Prince Albert

II of Monaco mask and other evidence found on Mr Chikli’s and Mr Lasarevitsch’s mobile phones after their arrests indicated that they next planned to impersonate Prince Albert II. Mr Chikli and Mr Lasarevitsch deny the charges, suggesting that someone else wearing the Le Drian mask perpetrated the scam. But in a 2010 French TV interview, Mr Chikli said: “You’ve either got the gift or you haven’t,” describing his earlier frauds. “It’s like famous actors. When it comes to me, you can say that I have a gift.” *BBC News*, 4 Feb 2020.

BACK FROM THE DEAD [FT389:6]



A skier buried for five hours under an avalanche in the Austrian Alps was found alive on Christmas Day. Rescuers described the 26-year-old’s survival as a “Christmas miracle”. He was found under three feet of snow two hours after a friend had alerted emergency services when he didn’t return from skiing. The rescue team managed to pinpoint his location by his electronic transceiver. He was suffering from hypothermia but was otherwise unharmed. It is believed his survival was due

in part to a sizeable air pocket under the blanket of snow that covered him, and because he continually moved his muscles to prevent hypothermia from becoming fatal. *D.Mail*, 28 Dec 2019.

WAITING FOR THE END [FT386:4]



Dutch prosecutors say the father of a family found locked away in a farm subjected six of his children, whom he believed to be “unclean”, to “very serious physical punishment”, punching, kicking and depriving them of food and drink. In order to drive out “bad spirits”, one child was tied up by his hands and feet, and another forced to spend an entire summer in a doghouse. The father is also suspected of having sexually abused two of his nine children.

In October 2019, police discovered five siblings and their 67-year-old father, Gerrit-Jan van Dorsten, in a hidden room in a farmhouse to the north of the Netherlands, where they are believed to have lived in seclusion for several years. The alarm was raised when the eldest son escaped and walked into a nearby bar, talking in a “confused state” about his captive siblings, causing officials to raid the farm. The family were “waiting for the end of days”, with some of the younger ones believing they were the only humans left on Earth, apparently having been kept indoors since birth. They reportedly spoke in a bizarre language of their own invention.

Van Dorsten was charged with abuse, unlawful detention and money laundering. Subsequent investigations led to further charges of sexual abuse. DNA tests indicate the ‘children’ to be between 18 and 25, and that the detained man was indeed their father. They had never been registered at birth or attended school, both of which are legal requirements in the Netherlands. *[R]* 28 Nov 2019; *Guardian*, 22 Jan 2020.



ABOVE: Gerrit-Jan van Dorsten, 67, has been charged with the abuse and unlawful detention of six of his children, who were found in a hidden room in his farmhouse.



KARL SHUKER identifies some supposed marine monsters and welcomes a new cavefish

EEL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL!

In mid-February 2020, media worldwide contained reports and photos of a very distinctive creature left washed up on a beach popular with surfers and sunbathers at Destiladeras, on the Pacific coast of Mexico. At first sight, it seemed to have a dolphin-like head brimming with teeth but lacking eyes; but its body was very long and slender, lacking any flippers or tail flukes. It also lacked a blowhole. On closer observation, moreover, its teeth could be seen not to be those of a mammal but rather those of a fish (not only in shape but also because there were three rows of them, with palatine or pterygoid teeth readily visible in the roof of the mouth), and its ostensibly long beak-like mouth was an optical artefact created by the angle at which the close-up photograph of its head had been snapped. As for its seeming lack of eyes, this was no doubt due to the carcass's state of decomposition, plus the likelihood that if there were any surviving vestiges of eyes, they would have sunk into the surrounding skin. Also, fish eyes rapidly dehydrate, and are often scavenged in carcasses anyway.

In short, this marine mystery beast was unequivocally a fish. Furthermore, in overall appearance it most closely resembled a moray eel, several different species of which inhabit the waters in this region. German cryptozoologist Markus Bühler, who has taken a particular interest in this case and has discussed it at length on social media, favours two species in particular – the Panamic green moray eel *Gymnothorax castaneus* and the fine-spotted moray eel *G. dovii*, of which the former is especially reminiscent of the Destiladeras carcass. Markus has also highlighted the presence of a pair of tubular extended nostrils at the very end of the creature's upper jaw, a typical feature for morays. Another cryptozoological case duly solved! *Sun, 13 Feb 2020.*

IS NESSIE NO MORE??

There must have been something in the water – seawater, that is – because at much the same time that certain media reports were covering the Destiladeras carcass, others were documenting the equally eye-catching, gigantic



marine monster carcass that was found washed ashore on an Aberdeenshire beach on 9 February 2020 in the wake of Storm Ciara. It was first brought to public attention later that same day by *Fubar News*, who posted a photograph of it on their Facebook page. An array of startling identities were suggested by readers, ranging from a saltwater crocodile or a killer whale to a dinosaur skeleton or even the mortal remains of Nessie! Happily, its exposed vertebræ swiftly revealed the carcass to be that of a whale. Indeed, it may even be one and the same as the minke whale carcass that was found in early October 2019 lying on the sands not far away at Blackdog. www.facebook.com/

FubarNews, 9 Feb; Rosshire Journal, 12 Feb; Daily Post 13 Feb 2020.

CAVEFISH COLOSSUS

Approximately 250 species of cavefish are currently known to science, characterised by their lack of body pigmentation as well as reduced or entirely absent eyes, and in particular by their relatively small total length, mostly just a few inches long – until now, that is. In February 2020, almost exactly a year after the extraordinary discovery was made in an Indian subterranean water-filled cave, a scientific paper was published describing a veritable colossus of the cavefish kind, measuring almost 18in (46cm) long and weighing 10 times as much as any previously documented cavefish.

Numerous specimens were spied by a cave survey team featuring Scottish speleologist Dan Harries in a small underground cavern called Um Ladaw Cave, over 300ft (90m) below the surface in northeastern India's Meghalaya State, but because of their size they were too big to be captured in Harries's net, so he resorted to luring them with biscuits placed inside an underwater bag, and then scooping one of them out of the water using his bare hands for laboratory examination. More specimens were collected during a return visit in January 2020.

This new type of cavefish proved to be an unpigmented and (in the biggest specimens) virtually eyeless version of the golden mahseer *Tor putitora*, a surface-dwelling carp species. Whether the cave-dwelling version is sufficiently distinct taxonomically to constitute a separate subspecies or even an entirely distinct species in its own right has yet to be determined, but visually it is exceedingly different, having evolved to live underground in complete darkness. www.nationalgeographic.com, 12 Feb; www.indiatoday.com, 13 Feb 2020.



LEFT: The eye-catching marine monster carcass found on an Aberdeenshire beach. **TOP:** The eyeless mystery beast that turned out to be a moray eel.

MOUSE VS FROG: A HAPPY ENDING

This little mouse had a lucky escape, pulling its whiskers from the sticky mouth of a tree frog intent on devouring it. Overcome by curiosity, the fortunate rodent then embarked on a closer inspection, apparently tolerated by the frog. Wildlife photographer Tanto Yensen who took the shots in Jakarta, Indonesia, said: “The frog opened its mouth to try to eat it but then changed its mind and became friends with the mouse instead. The pictures show us anyone can be friends”. *D.Mirror*, 6 Dec 2019. PHOTOS: Tanto Yensen / SWNS.





MEDICAL BAG

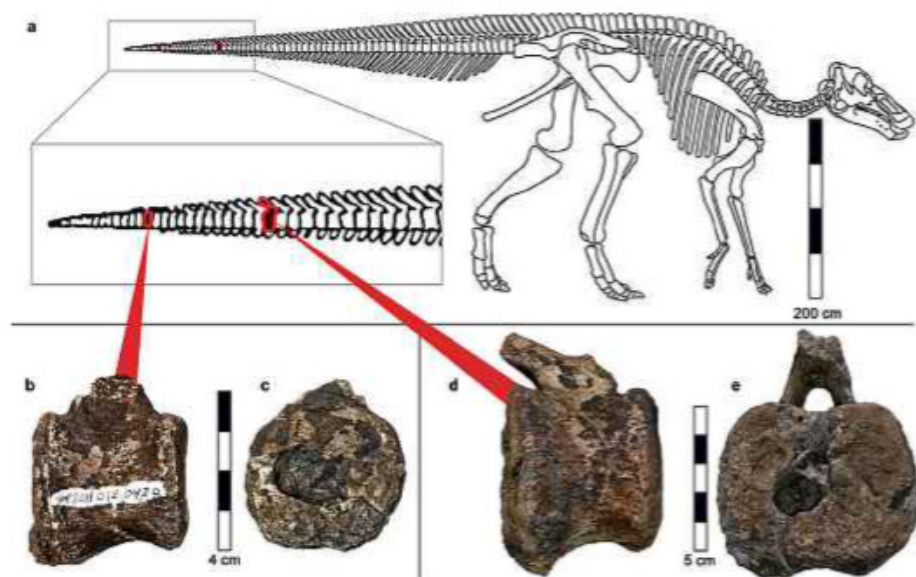
With reports of the new coronavirus spreading pandemically across the world's front pages, we take a look at other newsworthy diseases

ANCIENT MEASLES

On 3 June 1912, a two-year-old girl at Berlin's Charité University Hospital died of pneumonia following a measles infection. Her lungs were removed and preserved in formalin, then added to a collection of anatomical specimens where they lay for over 100 years until evolutionary biologist Sebastien Calvignac-Spencer of the Robert Koch Institute rediscovered them in the basement of Berlin's Museum of Medical History.

Measles is one of the most infectious human diseases; an estimated 142,000 people died from the disease in 2017. How, where and when it became a human pathogen is still debated. Measles' closest relative is a virus causing rinderpest (which, prior to its eradication in 2011, was a disease affecting cattle, deer, buffalo, and other even-toed ungulates. Fans of *avant-garde* writer and junkie William S Burroughs may recall one of his favourite lines, "That was the year of the Rinderpest, when everything died, even the hyenas", which recurs in *Naked Lunch*, *Queer* and *Soft Machine*). Most researchers believe both viruses had a common ancestor that infected cattle. But because there are few clear references to measles in historical disease descriptions, it is difficult to fix a date and a place.

Using a sample of the 1912 lungs, Calvignac-Spencer and his team were able to isolate the oldest known genome of the measles virus. This sequence has helped shed light on a much earlier period in measles' history. The team concluded the virus may have entered the human population as early as the fourth century BC, rather than the early mediæval period as was hitherto thought. Because it spreads so fast, and because infection gives lifelong immunity, scientists estimate a population of 250,000 to half a million people is required to prevent measles from burning itself out. It is thought that the largest cities reached such a size around the fourth century BC. Using sequencing from the 1912



TOP: The lungs rediscovered in the basement of Berlin's Museum of Medical History and which allowed researchers to isolate the oldest known measles genome.

ABOVE: The location of pathological vertebrae in the tail of a hadrosaur skeleton.

genome as well as that of others, Calvignac-Spencer's team drew up a phylogenetic tree suggesting the disease may have jumped to humans as early as 345 BC, exactly when cities are believed to have grown to the critical size. Similar studies suggest that HIV and other pathogens only became epidemic following major changes in the human population structure.

Monica Green, a historian of

infectious diseases at Arizona State University, described the Calvignac-Spencer team's sequencing as "very impressive", but said the study lacked sufficient data to "provide decisive answers" about measles' emergence. The team don't disagree, and hope that naturally mummified or frozen bodies from over 1,500 year ago will provide the missing data. [sciencemag.org](https://www.sciencemag.org). *uk*, 30 Dec 2019.

SLEEPING SICKNESS

The world was recovering from the flu pandemic of 1918, which had killed millions (many more than WWI), when a strange and puzzling illness broke out. The victims, especially young people, would go down with a high fever, headache and sore throat and develop a range of other symptoms, including double vision, weakness of the upper body, tremors, strange movements, intense muscle pain, and – perhaps most alarming – drowsiness, lethargy, psychotic behaviour and in many cases prolonged unconsciousness.

The cause and origins of the illness were a mystery, and it was given the Latin medical name *Encephalitis lethargica*, but to the general public it would be known as the 'sleeping sickness'. In the United Kingdom thousands were struck down, and although many recovered, others were left speechless and motionless for the rest of their lives. It was as if they had gone to sleep and never woken up. The malady swept around the world and it was estimated that over a million victims died and millions more were left incapacitated. In 1928 it vanished as suddenly as it had appeared some 10 years before. Its cause remains a mystery and it has not reappeared in epidemic form.

Can any readers versed in epidemiology tell us more about this? *Western Gazette*, 16 May 2019.

DINO'S TUMOUR

A far more ancient disease is the 66-million-year-old Langenhans cell histiocytosis (LCH) found recently in a dinosaur vertebra. Analysis of 11 pieces of tail vertebrae once belonging to a young hadrosaur (a giant 'duck-billed' herbivore) revealed tumours caused by this rare disease. Of the 11 tail segments found in Alberta, Canada, eight of them bore evidence of various pathological conditions; this was clearly a sickly hadrosaur. Some of the unusual lesions found by an international research team

had never before been seen in dinosaurs, but all the evidence pointed to LCH having existed since the late Cretaceous period. Although LCH has previously been found in other kinds of animals, like tree shrews and tigers, this is the first time it has been found in the fossil record.

LCH is a very rare type of cancer whose causes are unknown. The immune system contains cells called histiocytes that help combat skin infections, but if these cells spread to other parts of the body via the bloodstream, they can become destructive, forming tumours called granulomas. The disease usually affects young children, most of whom recover after having to endure pain and swelling.

Speaking about the practical application of the hadrosaur research, palaeopathologist Israel Herskovitz of Tel Aviv University said: “Ultimately, the goal of such studies is to understand the real cause of these illnesses and what evolutionary mechanisms allowed them to develop and survive. Perhaps if we understand a disease’s underlying mechanisms we can treat its causes more effectively, instead of focusing on the symptoms, as modern medicine tends to do.” *sciencealert.com, 12 Feb 2020.*

VIRUS FROM OUT OF SPACE?

Among the various unusual theories concerning Covid-19 [see FT390:4-5], one of the more plausible ones was that the coronavirus had come to Earth from outer space. That viruses, and indeed life itself, may have an extraterrestrial origin is of course not a new idea, being essentially Fred Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe’s panspermia theory [see FT277:32-37, 375:14, 385:8]. It was also suggested of the 2003 SARS epidemic that the

virus had arrived from space, hitching a ride on a comet, although the idea did not go unchallenged at the time. A 2003 letter to *The Lancet* queried Wickramasinghe’s claim that Earth is subjected to an influx of about one tonne of extraterrestrial microbes on a daily basis, estimated to be one-hundredth of the cometary material that falls to Earth each day. The letter writer also questioned the likelihood of viruses’ ability to exist in deep space, given their dependence on the intracellular molecular machinery of their hosts in order to complete their biological cycles:

*Sir,
Chandra Wickramasinghe and colleagues suggest that the causative agent of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic might have an extraterrestrial origin. Their unstated assumption is that the emergence of life and the sudden appearance of several global epidemics are the outcomes of a continuous bombardment of Earth with bacteria and viruses, originating in the interstellar grains and comets.*

This theory is unlikely. Delivery of exogenous material to the Earth’s surface is a well-documented phenomenon. It includes extraterrestrial organic compounds present in carbonaceous chondritic meteorites and interplanetary dust particles, which seem to be related to cometary nuclei. However, there is no basis for the claim made by Wickramasinghe and colleagues that there is a daily influx of about 1 tonne of extraterrestrial microbes [...]

Reconstruction of viral evolution can be notoriously complicated, but the evidence suggests that the SARS-associated coronavirus jumped into the human population from felines, which are considered a delicacy by many Asiatic gourmets.

Lancet, 2 Aug 2003.



247: SOLEMNLY, SINCERELY, TRULY



The myth

The option to affirm, rather than swear an oath, was introduced to allow atheists to give evidence in court.

The “truth”

The right to affirm in an English court of law was first granted by The Quakers Act 1695. Friends refused to swear in court, on the grounds that their religion required them to be honest at all times. If they were to promise to tell the truth on oath, this would suggest that they practised two grades of honesty – the sworn and the everyday. As Quakerism spread, the result was that several court cases collapsed because Quaker witnesses could not legally give evidence. The 1695 Act allowed them to “declare in the Presence of Almighty God” the truth of what they were saying – a wording which prevented atheists from affirming. Some Protestant sects refused to take oaths because they believed it to be forbidden in the very Bible that they were being asked to swear on (Matthew 5:34-37). Gradually, especially through the democracy struggles of the 19th century, various groups who had been unable or unwilling to swear were given the alternative of affirmation. Those without religious belief were finally accommodated by the Oaths Act 1888, which allowed them to use an entirely non-religious promise in all situations in England and Wales where an oath normally applied. So in fact, atheists were the last lot to be given the option of a “solemn affirmation”.

Sources

bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-32809040; nidirect.gov.uk/articles/giving-evidence-court; british-history.ac.uk/statutes-realm/vol7/p152; blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/lawbod/2013/01/07/quakers-and-the-law/

Update

In FT188:29 we dismissed the idea that baby birds touched by humans are abandoned by their parents. *RSPB Garden Birds* by Marianne Taylor (Bloomsbury, 2019) offers a better reason for leaving them alone: predators will use observation or scent trails to locate nests visited by humans.



STRANGE CONTINENT

Unfazed by Brexit, **ULRICH MAGIN** scours the papers for the weirdest news stories from across Europe...

BRESCIA'S SMELLY GIANT

We've all heard the one about the cleaning lady removing an installation from an art gallery because she thinks it is rubbish... From February to May 2018, a giant figure called 'Frank the Fakir', 16m (52ft) long and lying on a bed of nails made of 57,000 ice cream cones, was exhibited on a street in Brescia, northern Italy, as part of the San Luca Festival. The giant, created by artist Gabriele Picco, proved to be very popular. Frank was put in storage when the festival ended and had become quite smelly by the end of 2019. Nobody knew what to do with the enormous artwork; it was moved from one location to another, but eventually mice and water had done serious damage to poor old Frank. "The sculpture is intact," reported local daily *BresciaOggi*, "but the cones on which it rested are now completely degraded." Representatives of the art association B.e.l.l.e. arti, chaired by gallery owner Massimo Minini, were alarmed by the all-pervasive stench given off by 'Frank' and decided to clean him up, but got "carried away". "They dismembered my work without asking me," complained a furious Picco. "We had talked about the cones, and there were no problems with them. But to dismantle the statue they would've needed my supervision." Frank's market value is judged to 100,000 euros. Minini confessed the sculpture had been hacked to pieces, and nobody now knew where the various bits were. *BresciaOggi*, 19 Dec 2019.

LARGE CATS AT LARGE

Alien big cats continue to haunt European forests and meadows. Last autumn, sightings were made all over the border region the Czech Republic shares with Poland and Germany. Early



ABOVE: Frank the Fakir, created by artist Gabriele Picco, lying on a bed of nails made from 57,000 ice cream cones.

in October 2019, Jana Fricová of the Jablonec mayor's office warned people from entering the woods after a big cat was spotted near Prosecký hřeben, and a few days later at Korenov. She said the cat, of an unidentified species, was estimated to weigh around 100 kg, and where it had escaped from had not been ascertained. In mid-October, the animal was snapped by a photo trap near Jablonec. Hunters quickly informed police, who arrived with two vets armed with tranquiliser guns. The animal evaded capture and the photo was identified as "a puma or serval". *Sächsische Zeitung*, 4+15+22 Oct, 4 Nov 2019.

In November and December, a large spotted cat was seen on several occasions around Eitorf, Germany. There were some six reports in December, and one motorist said he almost ran over the cat in the industrial quarter of the city. At the end of the month, the animal (twice the size of a domestic

cat) ran into a photo trap and was identified as a serval, an African wild cat common in sub-Saharan countries. The owner could not be traced. The hunt intensified, and on 10 January, after it had repeatedly been observed in a garden, the cat was caught in a baited trap in Hennef. *Rhein-Sieg-Anzeiger* 4+11 Jan 2020.

Italy had its own big cat scare a few days later, when a panther was seen and photographed between Corneliano and Piobesi, in the northern province of Cuneo. Piobesi's mayor, Alessandra Balbo, told Ansa news agency: "Around noon a gardener from a private company was working at a villa and came across a panther which he at first mistook for a large black dog. He locked himself in the courtyard where he was working and alerted the municipality." Police had already received news of a second sighting. *Corriere di Como*, 13 Jan 2020.

And finally, a clever little cat. Before a landslide hit a village in Northern Italy in October 2019, Claudio Piana and Sabrina Pellegrini's pet cat woke the couple, allowing them to flee their two-storey-house before it was completely destroyed. *Die Rheinpfalz*, 24 Oct 2019.

NON-EXISTENT CITY

The 'Bielefeld conspiracy' started as a joke in May 1994, when Achim Held, then a computer science student at Kiel University, claimed on Usenet that the German city of Bielefeld (population 333,000) did not exist, and that a mysterious "they" claimed the contrary for some unfathomable (probably sinister) reasons. The joke was quickly taken up by computer nerds, and today, the Bielefeld conspiracy is well known in the country. The German search words "bielefeld verschwörung" generate more than a million google hits, and even Angela Merkel referred to



it in one of her speeches.

Bielefeld, which does exist and which I know quite well, has been using the increasing popularity of this modern myth for its own purposes (sinister or not), and in mid-August 2019, the city council offered a reward of one million euros to any person who could provide “incontrovertible evidence” of its nonexistence, or of the fact that it hides the entrance to Atlantis. “We are 99.9 per cent certain that we can refute any proof that we do not exist”, city officials explained. *Die Rheinpfalz*, 22 Aug 2019.

OUT-OF-PLACE ANIMALS

Police at Ciudad Real, Spain, have recovered an African tortoise weighing more than 25kg (55lb) after a motorist warned them that the large reptile was crossing a road at the city limits. The species, identified as a *Sulcata* giant tortoise, is a native of the Sahel, and police believe it was an escaped pet. *ABC Madrid*, 13 Oct 2019.

The golden jackal (*Canis aureus*), a wolf-like canid, lives in Asia and the Balkans, but cryptozoologist Andreas Trottmann informed me that a specimen was run over by a car on the road from Galmiz to Sugiez in Canton Freiburg, Switzerland. Jackals have been slowly invading Switzerland from the east for years, filling the ecological niche left by the wolf. The presence of jackals in the country was first indicated by a photo taken in 2011, and is now seemingly confirmed by the dead body, which was taken to the animal hospital at Berne. “The region is largely agricultural,” Andreas told me, “and is inhabited by many animals, among them wild boar, roe, fox and many species of waterfowl.” *Berner Zeitung*, 23 Dec 2019, *20min.ch*, 24 Dec 2019.

BOGUS SOCIAL WORKERS

In the first case of its kind in Germany that I am aware of, a man and a woman claiming to be officials from the local youth welfare office flashed



ABOVE: The mysterious ‘island’ photographed from Gavà Mar by Felicity Mateos.

fake ID cards and demanded entry to a woman’s flat in Duisburg-Hüttenheim on 19 December 2019. They said they were there to take care of the youngest child. The 30-year-old mother quickly shut the door and called the youth welfare service, which denied having sent anyone. Duisburg police said they were investigating all avenues: “At the moment, we are not certain whether we are dealing with a case of attempted child abduction or a new form of confidence trick we’ve not come across before.” The man was about 45 and the woman about 40 years old, and both spoke perfect High German. Only a few days before, a similar incident was reported from nearby Gelsenkirchen, also on the Ruhr. In Gelsenkirchen, two women had called at a door and demanded a family hand over one of their children. In this case, they couldn’t produce any ID cards. *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 21 Dec 2019.

ISLE OF THE DEAD

A small, privately owned Adriatic island off Dubrovnik in Croatia is up for sale – but can’t find a buyer. Daksa is the property of Nila Perica Dusilo Florshutz and Franica Dusilo Cavich, who offer it for only two million Euros. The island, with its beautiful bays, is covered by pines and orange trees, and is home to the ruins of a former abbey and a lighthouse. But it also has a disturbing history. In October 1944, Yugoslav partisans interned 300 Nazi collaborators, including priests, on this beauty spot

and shot 53 of them without trial. The machine gun fire, contemporary witnesses say, was heard on the mainland. Some of the collaborators were hanged from trees or thrown from cliffs. “In 1990,” says travel webpage *travelbook.de* in a piece from 15 November 2019, “visiting the island was still banned. And even today, the inhabitants of Dubrovnik claim that the spirits of those who were executed there haunt the island in the night.” In 2010, the bodies of those murdered were exhumed and buried in a cemetery, but this seems to have done little to dispel the island’s bad aura. However, fears cannot be too strong, as guided tours to Daksa are offered from Gruž, Dubrovnik’s port.

PHANTOM ISLANDS

In November and December, Barcelona newspaper *La Vanguardia* asked for readers’ pictures of phantom islands seen off the Catalan coast – and received lots of them. On 23 November 2019, Felicity Mateos spotted “a hovering city” on the horizon off the beach at Gavà Mar, and snapped pictures and a film of the phenomenon, which looks a little like Gulliver’s Laputa. “At 15.48 I looked towards El Prat and noticed something like an island at a distance of 1,000 to 2,000 metres,” she said. “It is difficult to judge the distance. I spoke to three ladies on the beach and asked them what it was. They hadn’t seen it and didn’t know of any city there.” The floating island or “megastructure”

had already been noticed by Beatriz María Villena Martínez on 18 November. Most readers agreed that it was just a ship, while others suggested a floating oil platform. A week later, the paper carried pictures of new “mysterious islands”, this time in Asturias. Said Noelia Rodríguez Merino: “I, too, saw the mystery island, but off Gijón. I never knew what it was but I think it has now been seen in Barcelona.” On 25 December, Óscar Mario Jiménez Gayango photographed two skyscrapers sitting in the Strait of Gibraltar. All these enigmatic islands, as readers continued to point out, were mirages of ships. *La Vanguardia*, 24+27+29+30 Nov, 27 Dec 2019.

LAST TRUMP?

Did the last trump sound in the Netherlands recently? Roy van Zon posted a video on Facebook featuring the sounds of an apocalyptic trumpet. The video, said to have been taken on 9 or 10 December 2019, is quite fuzzy, but on the soundtrack one can hear a strange noise, a bit like someone blowing into a water hose. Van Zon says that other residents of Valkenswaard also heard it: “I’m glad I wasn’t the only one who heard these sounds, as I thought I was going crazy.” Local newspaper *Omroep Brabant* carried the story and interviewed Lennart de Groot, a geophysicist at Utrecht University. He said similar sounds were heard several times a year at different locations around the globe, and that they were caused by terrestrial noise from industrial sites being reflected by layers between cold and warm air. He recalled a similar video a few years back with exactly the same sound (see FT329:4 for more ‘last trump’ videos and recordings) and added: “You can never exclude a hoax.” <https://www.unexplained-mysteries.com/news/333037/apocalyptic-sky-sounds-heard-in-netherlands>; *Omroep Brabant*, 12 Dec 2019.



RELIGIOUS ROUND-UP | Weeping Madonnas, angelic visions, miraculous mittens, and Pope Francis branded a heretic...



ABOVE: An icon of the Virgin Mary in Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Chicago was seen to be weeping oily tears.
BELOW: Another lachrymose BVM; this one started to weep during a New Year's Eve service in a Mexican chapel.

MARY WEEPS AGAIN

Early on Sunday morning, 8 September 2019, a caretaker at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Chicago, Illinois, saw what looked like oily tears pouring from the eyes of a Virgin Mary icon. About 300 people came to see the icon that day, and even more the next day. On Monday the residue of the oil-like substance streaming from the Virgin Mary's eyes remained, with many believing the oil had healing properties and that its origins were a blessing from God. "There's something she's trying to tell us, so we're just going to seal our lips and listen to what she has to say," said Father Nick Jonas.

The church faced foreclosure and went to bankruptcy court the next day. A judge approved the sale of the building to Universal Life Church for \$2.5 million. Holy Trinity was given 75 days to relocate. It is the second oldest Greek Orthodox Church in the US, though the present building only dates from the 1960s. The Orthodox authorities asked the parish for temporary possession



of the icon. After a period of prayer and examination, it would be returned and the church issue an official statement. *abc13.com, abc7chicago.com, 10 Sept; thescottishsun.co.uk, 11 Sept; Victoria (BC) Times Colonist, 14 Sept 2019.*

- Another weeping BVM was seen in a Mexican church during a New Year's Eve service. Parishioners in San Antonino Obispo chapel in the town of Cerro Armadillo Grande noticed a statue of the BVM kept behind a locked glass case had seemingly begun weeping. As is often the case, word soon spread in the vicinity and crowds gathered at the church to pray beside the statue. One visitor suggested the crying could be a warning that "something will happen," expressing concern that "it is a mandate from Heaven for disobedience to the Law of God." Another thought it a message "from above" but hoped the BVM "will not announce tragedies." *coasttocoastam.com, 6 Jan 2020.* For other BVM appearances, see **FT172:12-13, 257:21, 263:8, 350:8, 369:22.**

ANGELIC VISION

Three years ago, Nadim Ednan-Laperouse watched helplessly as his 15-year-old daughter Natasha died from an allergic reaction on board a plane to Nice. Natasha had unknowingly eaten a sandwich containing sesame seeds, to which she was highly allergic. Nadim and his wife Tanya became well known for their campaign to have food labelling laws changed so that people with allergies could be forewarned.

But Nadim recently spoke for the first time of an extraordinary experience at the moment of his daughter's tragic death. She had been injected with adrenalin, to no avail, so as soon as the plane landed, paramedics were attempting CPR, so vigorously that they broke her ribs. "Just as it couldn't get worse," recalled Nadim, "these five angels just appeared, and this yellow light, strong, soft yellow light, rather

like a candlelight but really intense and in great detail, these five figures like thin people just appeared with wings on their backs.” He remembers the figures clearly and describes them as “about 20cm [8in] tall, not chubby like children in a Renaissance painting and with feathery wings like in the Vatican, but actually like human beings, all looking at me, moving around Natasha. I’d never ever seen anything like that in my life.” Understanding these to be angels come to take away his daughter, he says he shouted, “This is not her time,” and waved them away. They disappeared, but at that moment Natasha died.

Because no one else saw these figures, a hallucination at a moment of unimaginable stress must be considered. But Nadim is convinced that what he saw was not an illusion, saying: “I am the least likely person to have an hallucination. I am not prone to such things ever. I’ve always been calm and stalwart in times of stress.” At the time he was an atheist, but in the following months he began going to church and now believes these ‘angels’ appeared to him for a profound reason, having changed his outlook so that now he places importance on faith in God as opposed to material success. “In my past years in business I have stood on stages with David Cameron or Gordon Brown, I was awarded an MBE by Buckingham Palace for services to business... I look back now and see it as all completely irrelevant”.

He believes that he and his wife would not have had the strength for their campaigning were it not for his experience. In the end they were successful, and a new law (that food manufacturers must now warn customers of potential allergens) came into force. *BBC News*, 7 Jan 2020.

HOLY GLOVE

In Castleisland, Co Kerry, over 1,000 people flocked to the Church of Saints Stephen and John to be blessed with one of the fingerless gloves worn by Saint Padre Pio [FT162:34-39, 237:4-5]. The glove was worn by the stigmatic saint in order to conceal the palm injuries which, his followers claim, corresponded to Christ’s crucifixion wounds [FT163:36-40].



ABOVE AND BELOW: Padre Pio left some typically down-to-earth relics in the form of his trademark fingerless gloves, a number of which are venerated around the world.



Father Bryan Shortall is National Director for the Padre Pio Apostolate and travels across Ireland to bless people with the glove. “We all have favourite sports stars,” he explained. “We all like the Roy Keane jersey... or the Cristiano Ronaldo jersey... So, in a religious sense, the Padre Pio mitten is one such way of people connecting to Christ, primarily through the intercession of a saint.” Padre Pio was revered during his lifetime (1887-1968), but his popularity continued to grow after his death, and in 2002

he was finally canonised. People came to the church for a variety of reasons. Eileen Walsh from nearby Cordal said she had come because of her great devotion to Padre Pio, and that she was hoping for “a bit of peace, and good health and happiness.” Her friend Mary B O’Sullivan, from Farranfore, said of the glove benediction, “It will make my faith stronger.” *rte.ie*, 7 Jan 2020.

TEST OF FAITH

A Pennsylvania woman was arrested after allegedly driving into oncoming traffic and hitting a car carrying three passengers in order to “test her faith”, according to Pennsylvania State Police. Nadejda Reilly, 51, told Pennsylvania State Trooper Bruce Balliet that she had been driving on a local route for several hours, waiting for a “calling from God”. Seeing a car drive on the opposite side of State Route 93, she allegedly “wanted to test her faith by driving through the vehicle”. She then drove her 2017 Kia Optima into the opposing lane of traffic and struck the car.

Reilly and two injured victims were taken to hospital. She was charged with aggravated assault, simple assault, reckless endangerment and harassment, as well as several traffic violations. *cnn.com*, 20 Jan 2020.

HERETICAL POPE

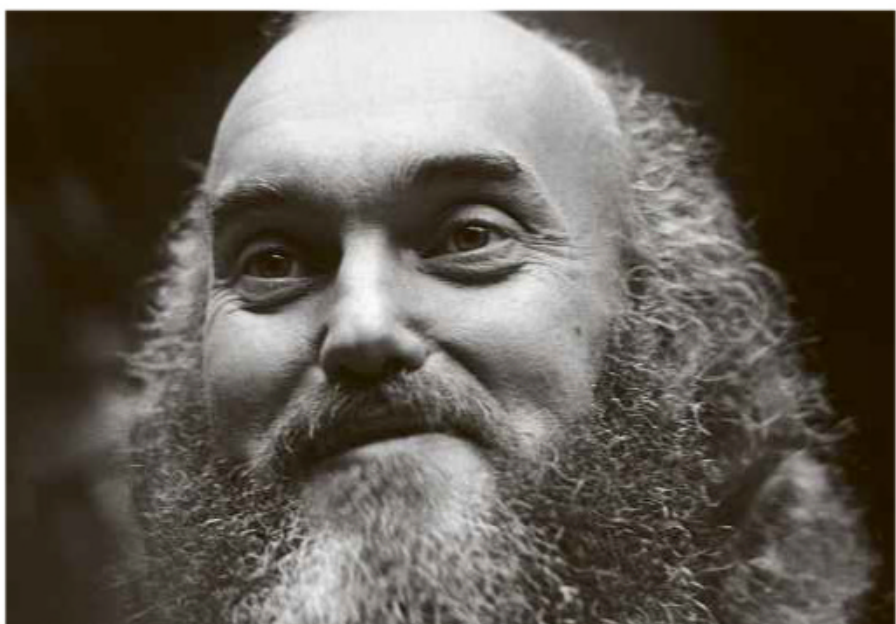
Pope Francis continues to alarm some Catholics who regard him as a dangerous reformer (see FT390:10). The outgoing Pope, Benedict XVI, has warned his successor not to alter celibacy regulations for priests. Francis is said to be considering a relaxation of the rules so that married men could be ordained. The issue was highlighted at last year’s Amazon Synod, when concerns at a severe shortage of priests in the region were raised. Some remote Amazon areas are only visited by a priest twice a year.

Elsewhere, three hermits living in Orkney were excommunicated in January after calling the Pope a “heretic” and warning that “evils” were destroying the Church. The group, consisting of two men, self-described as a priest and a monk, and a laywoman, formerly a senior doctor, live on the island of Westray with a number of cats. They run a blog, which details their objections to the Church’s stance on issues like homosexuality. “Wherever we look we see heresy in the ascendant, Christian marriage derided, and morals depraved in the clergy,” read an online declaration, describing Francis as the worst pope in history. One of the group, Stephen De Kerdrel, argues that “most Christian churches, with the exception of the Orthodox churches, are now so over-run by liberalism and secularism and humanism that they’ve ceased really being churches”.

Meanwhile, embracing modernity, Francis has lent his approval to a new *Minecraft* game based on Jesuit values. The game was developed by Father Robert Ballacer, a Jesuit priest based in Rome, who said his aim had been to create a less toxic environment for Catholic gamers. Francis is the first Jesuit to be elected Pope. *Times*, 7 Sep 2019; <i>, 28 Nov 2019, 11-12 Jan; BBC News, 8 Jan; Metro, 14 Jan 2020.



NECROLOG | A psychedelic pioneer and New Age icon heads for the great workshop in the sky, followed by a forensic pathologist who investigated headline mystery deaths



ABOVE LEFT: Ram Dass photographed in San Francisco, 1970.

RAM DASS

The psychedelic pioneer and New Age guru Baba Ram Dass (formerly Richard Alpert), left his physical body on 22 December 2019. He was 88 years old.

Born Richard Alpert to a Jewish family from Newton, Massachusetts, he graduated from Tufts University, going on to attain a Ph.D. at Stanford. A promising early-career academic at Harvard as a psychology professor and researcher, Alpert described himself at the time as an ambitious, driven “anxiety-neurotic”, having a great deal of knowledge but little wisdom. Timothy Leary joining the Harvard psychology department in 1959 proved a pivotal moment, and the two men quickly became friends. Leary introduced him to psilocybin (the active ingredient in certain hallucinogenic mushrooms) which led to Alpert’s first psychedelic experience. “The rug crawled and the picture smiled, all of which delighted me,” he recalled, in his most well-known book *Be Here Now*.

The pair embarked on a series of experiments using psilocybin, giving it to “jazz musicians and physicists and philosophers and ministers and junkies and graduate students and social scientists.”

Afterwards, these subjects were given questionnaires; during their trips they had apparently experienced bliss, heightened awareness via the physical senses, accelerated thought processes, and hallucinatory experiences such as having seen God.

Alpert and Leary began to use the more powerful LSD in their experiments, which, like psilocybin, was legal at the time. However, in 1963, when Harvard authorities learned they were using students as subjects, both men were fired. The pair moved to the famous Millbrook mansion in New York State, where they continued their inner voyages. In attempts to forestall the inevitable return to reality when the drug’s effects wore off, Alpert and five others tried to generate a more durable and long-lasting state by taking LSD every four hours over a period of three weeks. “What happened in those three weeks in that house no one would ever believe, including us,” he said; but they had still not managed to avoid coming down. (In fact, if taken on successive days, LSD swiftly becomes ineffective, since both the body and mind develop a tolerance which can only be reversed if one ceases ingesting

the drug for a while). Alpert and Leary’s co-written *The Psychedelic Experience* (1964) became an important handbook for LSD adventurers, along with the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (on which it was based).

The quest for a more permanent enlightenment led to Alpert’s 1967 visit to India, where the guru Neem Karoli Baba (known to his devotees as Maharaj-ji) gave him his new name, Ram Dass, meaning ‘servant of God’ (the prefix Baba is an honorific given to Hindu and Sikh holy men, loosely having the meanings ‘grandfather’, ‘sir’, or ‘wise old man’). He returned to the USA with long hair, a beard, and the instruction to “love everyone and tell the truth”. No longer an advocate of psychedelic drugs as aids to spiritual advancement, Ram Dass instead became a figurehead for Eastern spirituality, particularly meditation. His prominent media profile proved highly influential for the burgeoning New Age movement; during the late 1960s and 1970s his smiling, serene face became a familiar one that served to promote his ideas. His 1971 book *Be Here Now*, which told of his spiritual rebirth, became a significant and canonical text. Steve Jobs, who used LSD as an aid to creativity, said Ram Dass’s book had “transformed me and many of my friends.” George Harrison used the book’s title and its general philosophy for one of his songs.

In the 1970s, Ram Dass began exploring ageing, death, and the conscious acceptance of both, running workshops, among whose students was Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, of ‘five stages of grief’ fame. Ram Dass suffered a stroke in 1997, but chose to regard this as a lesson in accepting change, ageing and death, saying “the stroke has gotten me into a stage of life – this is a stage close to death, a stage which is inward.” Describing his

life’s work, Ram Dass told the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 2004: “I was a sort of spiritual uncle to a movement – to a consciousness movement bringing the East and West together”.

Ram Dass, psychedelic pioneer and New Age guru, born Richard Alpert, Newton, Massachusetts, 6 April 1931; died Maui, Hawaii, 22 Dec 2019, aged 88.

IAN CALDER

Ian Maddison Calder studied medicine at St Andrews University, later being awarded doctorates in both medicine and science. He trained in pathology at Addenbrooke’s, Cambridge, and at three London hospitals including St George’s, where he became a lecturer in forensic pathology. His work as a pathologist placed him in the public eye when called as an expert witness to advise on mysterious deaths. He was involved in the investigation of newspaper magnate Robert Maxwell’s fall (or shove) from his boat and death in the Atlantic, the case of a young man’s body found in entertainer Michael Barrymore’s swimming pool, and the ‘spy in the bag’ mystery of an MI6 agent whose body was found in a sports bag inside his flat.

In the 1991 Maxwell case, speculation that the tycoon had been murdered was only partly quashed when a Spanish inquest found he had died from a heart attack combined with accidental drowning. Three pathologists had been unable to agree on the cause, and Calder was to Israel where Maxwell had already been buried. Unfortunately, authorities refused permission for an exhumation.

31-year-old butcher Stuart Lubbock’s body was discovered by emergency services at the home of TV presenter Michael Barrymore in 2001. Initially, it was thought that Lubbock had drowned in the swimming pool, but the police investigation had been flawed, with a failure to



carry out a forensic examination of the scene. Calder was called upon during the 2002 inquest to carry out a third post mortem after the first two proved inconclusive; he found internal injuries suggestive of a brutal sexual assault, and other signs indicative of asphyxiation. However, the coroner ruled that the cause of death was 'unascertainable', recording an open verdict.

Calder conducted a second post mortem on the body of Gareth Williams, the mathematician whose decomposed body was found in an airtight holdall in the bath of his Pimlico flat in 2010. When newspapers learned that Williams had worked for MI6, various theories were proposed to explain his death, ranging from a sex game gone wrong to assassination by a foreign power. Calder was unable to ascertain how or why Williams had ended up in the bag, but did observe that the carbon dioxide build-up inside it would have become toxic within two to three minutes; high levels of CO² in his bloodstream indicated this to have been the cause of death.

Calder's research into deep sea diving during the North Sea Oil rush of the 1970s led to changes in international guidelines and regulations that improved commercial divers' safety. His expertise in forensic pathology led him to assist the World Health Organisation in their investigations into mass killings in the Balkans, Iran and Sri Lanka. He was consulted by the Centre for Neurological Disease during its studies of variant Creutzfeld-Jakob disease, caused by the consumption of meat from animals with 'mad cow' disease. Calder investigated potential links with kuru, a disease found in a former brain-eating tribe from Papua New Guinea, travelling there on several occasions where he obtained samples and undertook anthropological research to understand the practice of cannibalism within the tribe.

Ian Calder, forensic pathologist, born Norwich, 22 Mar 1934; died Cambridge, 6 Jan 2020, aged 85.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

VIRAL STORIES

I write this as the world shudders towards a zombie apocalypse-lite. Every day, the numbers infected by coronavirus rise, and every day the deaths from the same tick up. The figures, particularly from Iran and Italy, suggest that the governments there are either under-reporting or that they have tracked down only a fraction of those who are ill. We are entering the phase of, horrible word, 'mitigation': humanity's chance to contain this virus has perhaps failed. You, dear reader, will have a much clearer sense of the consequences of all the above when you consider these words in a few weeks (this was written 4 March, just outside the danger zone in Italy). However, for now, what has all this to do with folklore or forteana?

Well, epidemics cause confusion and kill people. But they also whip up the impossible, the implausible and the colourful in human nature and human experience. These include conspiracy theories: mediæval visitations of plagues were often blamed on a minority (lepers for instance) putting plague dust into the well. There are horrible, just believable narratives: killer lovers (AIDS Mary) or killer nurses in Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*. And there is widespread magical thinking, bloodily personified in the flagellant cult, a reaction to the Black Death.

MEDIÆVAL
PLAGUES WERE
OFTEN BLAMED
ON A MINORITY
PUTTING PLAGUE
DUST INTO THE
WELL

Coronavirus has already produced its own respectable crop. We have new conspiracy theories, including a claim that the Chinese government is employing the virus to remotely control human bodies through 5G waves, vaccines and chemtrails. We have prophecy: Nostradamus saw coronavirus coming (yawn), but apparently so too did a 2017 *Asterix* comic

and a 1989 Dean Koontz novel and, as ever, *The Simpsons*. We have unreasonable fears: cats and dogs carry the virus, as does Chinese bubble wrap. There are false stats: I particularly enjoy the allegation that Corona beer has suffered \$132,000,000 in lost revenues, because people associate the brand with the illness. So far full narratives have not developed – at least none have come to my attention – but when they do I predict that they will include sociopaths or state actors deliberately spreading the

virus by devious, if impractical, means. There will be rumours, too, of unexpected survivals and unusual patterns in deaths, tracing the hand of God or the Illuminati. Expect, as well, some heart-warming but unsourced yarns about complete strangers, preferably from different countries (or perhaps of different generations), being nice to each other. Legendary material is being created before our very eyes. I'm keeping notes, so get in touch if you have examples. Otherwise, be safe as the waves of the virus pass, I hope, over and around you and your families.



Memos from God

JENNY RANGLES ponders the ways in which our brains create significance and shape UFO reality

I had a rough time on social media lately. Here, toxicity of argument is ramped up by the ability to hide behind avatars that turn people into warriors without consequence. My confrontations were not fortan, but I was losing focus on writing a new book that was, so it became frustrating.

Rather rattled, I hopped on the bus, as my local cat shelter needed supplies. Then, being eager to get back to work, I became anxious travelling home when we stopped at a crossing with a line of traffic leading to a major junction. I knew that once the lights turned green just a few vehicles would creep through before another long wait ensued.

The bus driver was starting to lose patience when an elderly couple appeared, one in a wheelchair, slowly starting to cross. I heard an audible sigh as the driver considered a dash forward to strand them dangerously. For a second, I resonated with his everyday ethical dilemma.

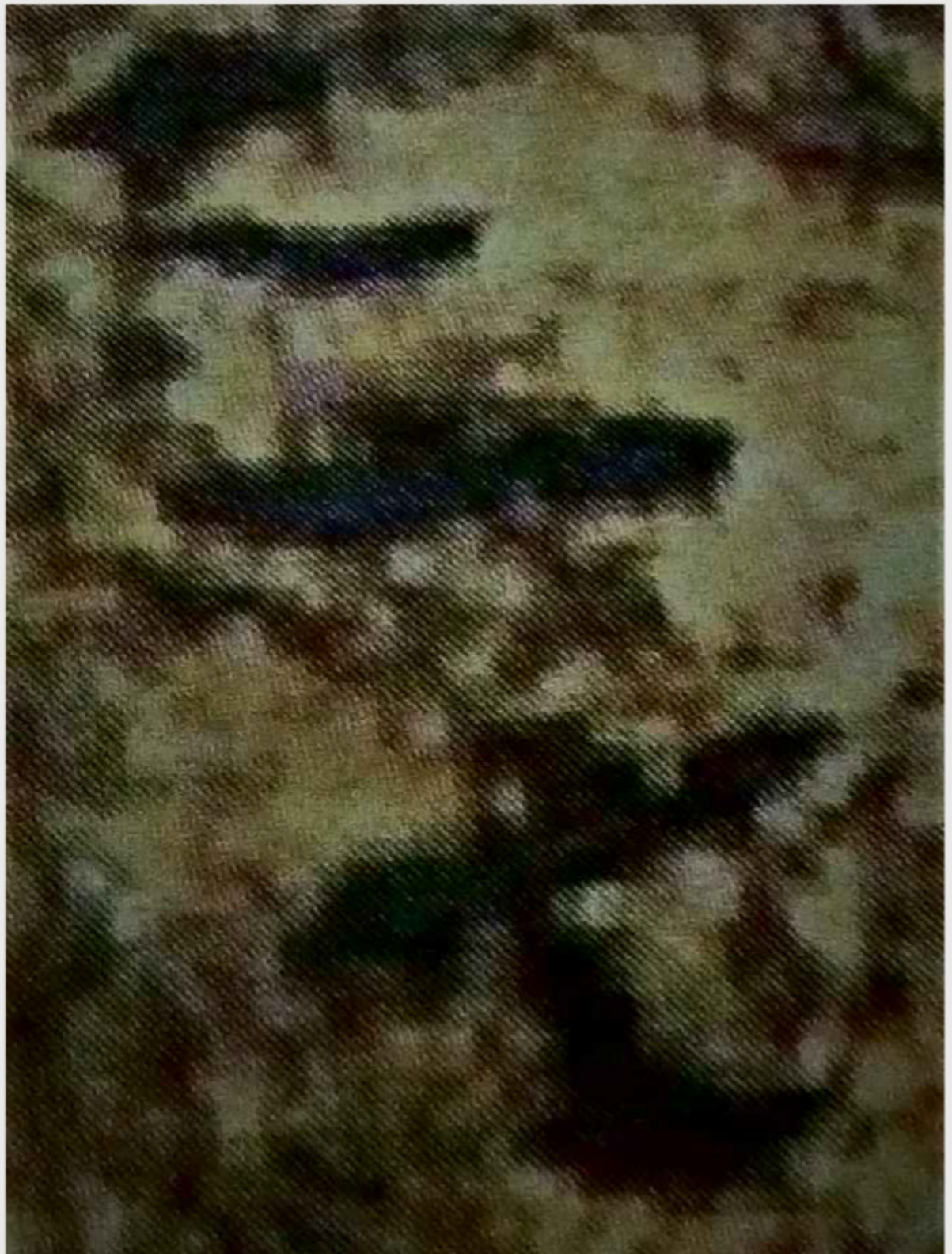
Having been a carer pushing a wheelchair for years, I wanted to root for the couple; but I could feel the conflict raging within because I also wanted to beat the lights. The couple made it and the lights changed. But I felt a pang of remorse as the driver accelerated at speed, ignoring other stranded pedestrians.

I found this trivial experience sobering given my weeks of arguing in a debate about prioritising human rights online.

By chance, as I arrived home I found the same rights issue was the subject of *The Moral Maze*, a BBC radio programme in which ethical conflicts are explored and debated. Here, comedy writer Graham Linehan (of *Father Ted* and *The IT Crowd* fame) was a participant. I had discussed this issue online and in private with him, as it is one that directly impacted my life. I supported most things Graham said on the issue but not all. This had become my crossroads of the soul moment.

After getting home (and feeding the cats) it struck me that this minor incident on the bus had focused my thoughts in unexpected ways. I thought of it as a 'Memo from God' moment; not that I believed the Almighty was making direct contact with me, just that this was one of those events that tips our thinking in a particular direction and when we are nudged by our subconscious, focusing our perceptions on normally automatic processes, to see what perhaps we could not before.

This incident on the bus did not feature out-of-body states or the suspension of



ABOVE: This image taken of the surface of Mars appears to be a signature of the initials ET. **BELOW:** Turn the image around and the letters change to WP. So is it short for 'Extraterrestrial' or 'What Plonkers?' This is a chance illusion invested with meaning by the processes occurring in your brain.

The brain is well trained to fill in gaps and to misinterpret anything not quite normal to match past perceptions



time, so it was not an ‘Oz Factor’ episode (a subject I have covered in this column before). But it did suggest to me an overlap that widened that phenomenon.

In 1982, when I experienced the Oz Factor first hand (as previously described here) it led almost magically to me resolving my problem. But this February 2020 experience suggests the Oz Factor may be at an extreme edge of a much wider and more common experience of gentle, subliminal ‘memos from God’ nudging our thinking in confusing situations and helping our brains to chart a new course.

How does this relate to UFOs? There is nothing supernatural about a jab in the ribs from our subconscious; perhaps the Oz Factor crosses a threshold as normal human senses are appropriated to guide us toward what seems to be supernormal insight.

However, I think it runs deeper. Because more gentle nudges often go unnoticed. The Oz Factor triggers altered states of consciousness, including time distortion, repressing of sensory input and access to sources of information beyond the mundane. Perhaps extreme ‘memos from God’ are priority-marked as urgent by our brain and tagged with suitable emphasis.

The brain is an amazing organ, but as we rely on it so much we take it for granted and consider it infallible. Yet it is built to do things like any machine. We misinterpret reality all the time and misjudge what we perceive, or even how improbable something is. All strange events are filtered through these flawed mental processes. These musings suggest a relevance to the UFO phenomenon.

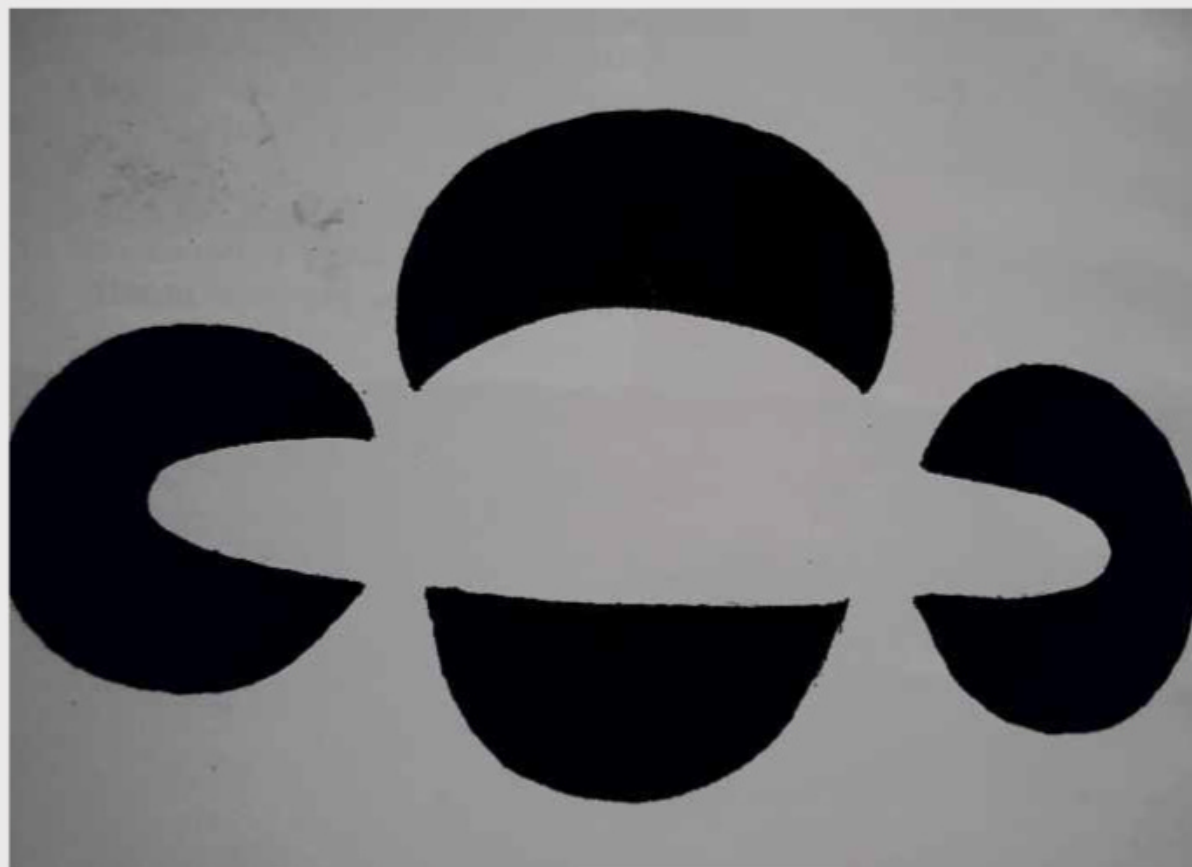
Some years ago, I wrote a radio programme about coincidence and cited a few examples. A caller from Liverpool rang and told me how something amazing had happened to him on a building project when a particular type of tool went missing and he needed to buy one. As he walked off on the quest, exactly the item he sought literally fell out of the sky at his feet. The startled man looked up to see who had dropped it. There was no one there – although as whoever had dropped the object had nearly killed him, perhaps their absence was not too surprising!

Coincidence, yes. But supernatural? Probably not.

We always over overestimate significance and underestimate chance. How many tools go missing every day? Probably so many that need and deliverance must occasionally coincide. If this event happened another day, in another context, it would likely get forgotten; and the millions of occasions where no magical resolution follows get ignored while we focus on the tiny few in which it does.

It is easy to confer meaning onto meaninglessness, and as the brain functions by seeking patterns then this kind of event gets tagged with a significance that it may not deserve.

Optical illusions – a subject of considerable import to UFOs but rarely



TOP: My new version of the Kanizsa illusion. The ‘UFO’ is just empty space, but whatever you do your brain fills in so that you see it as a ‘saucer’.

appreciated – seem relevant here as well. They show just how our perception of reality is constructed inside our mind and not captured by the brain like a camera. The process often defies our expectation of objective reality. We perceive what our brain constructs but it follows patterns and rules that operate subconsciously. It can literally create things we ‘see’ that are not ‘there’. Perception treats anomalies via what in effect is a best guess scenario.

By definition UFOs, as anomalies, are perceptions we do not recognise. We assume the brain just shows us what is there. But it doesn’t. If you Google “classic optical illusions” you can get some insight into why your brain interprets anomalies as it does. Our brains routinely cross-reference common experiences when looking at something we do not recognise. They trigger major errors of perception even when no UFO is involved. So why would it be any different when one is?

Note especially the “two grey tiles” or “Cornsweet” illusion. Here you see a light tile and a dark tile. And even when the error is revealed to you and you see the true, identical colours that categorically exist beyond doubt, your brain will nonetheless stubbornly refuse to ever see them the ‘real’ way.

We experience false reality because the brain is interpreting perception as true via rules that *mostly* work. They just struggle when something steps outside the norm.

Our brains forge and change shapes, colours and sizes; they manufacture motion that is not happening, and more. Multiple illusions show this. The brain is well trained to fill in gaps and assume something must be there, and to misinterpret anything not quite normal to match something found among our past perceptions.

This is why we ‘see’ the letters ET on the surface of Mars (the photo is reproduced

on the opposite page). It’s why we see fairies in the sunlit gaps between trees. It’s human nature, driven by the mechanics of the brain mismatching anomalies.

A Trieste psychologist called Gaetano Kanizsa designed an illusion in which a triangle is created that is not really there. But we never fail to see it. Our visual perception always gets taken over by the brain seeking a match and ‘creating’ fiction.

Another similar illusion invents a circle just through perception of colour difference. You cannot *not* see the circle, but like the triangle it is not there. I modified these illusions to create one where a UFO magically appears (above). But it follows the same principle as the one designed by Kanizsa. The ‘UFO’ is just empty space, but whatever you do, your brain fills in so that you see it as a ‘saucer’.

So what is ‘reality’ in terms of UFO perception? Is it there because you *do* see it, or not there because you know that is illusion? When anomalous perception is occurring, the rules of reality change. This matters, because anomalous perception is the start point of every UFO sighting.

A further vital point to bear in mind is that I designed the UFO illusion to resemble a disc-shaped ‘flying saucer’ – but we only regard it as a ‘UFO’ because this shape is now associated with it in our culture and stored in our brains under that tag.

If you could show that illusion to someone from 100 years ago, they will still see it as the same shape; but with no cultural history of flying saucers they would perhaps describe the ‘disc’ as a hat, or just see an odd shape appear without cultural meaning.

Optical illusions are a major clue that sometimes flying saucers are quite literally real while appearing from within the workings of our brains. We quite literally shape UFO reality.

THE LONDON MONSTER

A century before Jack the Ripper, another predator stalked the streets of London. Fresh from filming a new documentary on the subject, **JAN BONDESON** and **DENNIS MOHR** attempt to apprehend the buttock-stabbing phantom attacker who terrorised the capital's women...

In 1790, nearly a century before Jack the Ripper haunted the streets of London, another predator held sway. The Monster, as this mysterious miscreant was soon dubbed, used to walk up to a beautiful, well-dressed lady, insult her with coarse and earthy language, and then stab her in the thigh or buttocks. He struck at regular intervals, wounding a number of attractive young women in the London streets: in a 'sextuple event' on 19 January, his tally was not less than six victims. Since this kind of sadistic behaviour was unheard of at the time, there was general outrage among Londoners, and the capital's female world was in turmoil.

Throughout the first half of 1790, the newspapers were full of the Monster's latest outrages. Long-defunct papers like the *World*, the *Argus* and the *Diary* did much to emphasise the sense of an elusive outside threat and the need for vigilante action. The police were roundly criticised for their failure to capture the Monster, and it was even hinted that they were deliberately sheltering the culprit, a gentleman of wealth. In early April, a £100 reward was posted by the Lloyd's insurance broker John Julius Angerstein for the capture of the mysterious attacker. Large posters were pasted up all over London to announce that a bloodthirsty, inhuman Monster was on the prowl, attacking young and beautiful women in the streets. These posters accomplished what the newspapers had started, namely to create veritable mass hysteria. Both the police and various amateur Monster-hunters were out in force. Innocent men were beaten up by the mob after being pointed out as the Monster by mischievous people, and fashionable ladies did not dare venture out into the streets without wearing copper petticoats or other forms of protective clothing.

The Monster attacks continued throughout April and May, although it was notable that the descriptions of the culprit varied greatly with regard to height, dress, complexion and hair colour. The Monster-hunters suspected that the fiend was wearing several coats, one on top of the other, and that he made use of a collection of wigs and false noses to disguise his appearance. Mr Angerstein disagreed, pointing out that there was good reason to suspect that *more than one* of these wretches were infesting the streets. Some ladies faked Monster attacks to gain sympathy and compassion: his propensity to attack only



BELOW: One of John Julius Angerstein's Monster posters, which were pasted up all over London in April 1790. LEFT: Jan Bondeson holding up one of Angerstein's posters in a still from the film *The London Monster*. FACING PAGE: "The Monster Detected", a satirical print depicting him as the Devil.

Pall-Mall, 7th May, 1790.

Mr. ANGERSTEIN Informs the Public,

THAT from the Information he has received of the PERSON who since Friday last, has assaaulted and wounded several Women, there is great Reason to fear that more than *ONE* of those *WRETCHES* infest the Streets; it is therefore thought Necessary to give the following Description of *ONE* who, within this Week, has committed many Acts of Cruelty upon Women.

HE is generally described to be a Person upwards of six Feet high, thin made, and thin visaged; full Eyes, a large Nose, and is marked with the Small-pox on his Cheek Bones. On Friday Night last, when he assaaulted a Woman in *Vigo Lane*, he was dressed in a blue great Coat, with a light coloured Coat under it; light coloured Waistcoat; cocked Hat; and had a Stick in his Hand. On Saturday Night and Monday Night last, when he wounded a young Woman in *Conduit Street*, he was dressed in dark brown Clothes, and wore a round Hat flapped over his Face. On Tuesday Evening, between seven and eight o'Clock, when he wounded a Woman in *Marybone Street*, he wore a black Coat, white Stockings, and half Boots; and upon one of his Stockings was a Spot of Blood; a round Hat with a high Crown; his Hair platted behind, and frizzed at the Sides; at this Time he had a DAGGER about fourteen Inches long. And on Wednesday Night, when he wounded a poor Woman in *Holborn*, he wore a drab coloured furtout Coat, which reached juft below his Knees; striped Waistcoat; white Stockings; a cocked Hat, with a high Brim, and a Cockade; his Hair frizzed at the Sides, in a Bush; platted and turned up behind; and had a Nofegay in his Hand.

PRINTED BY J. MOORE, NO. 134, DRURY-LANE.

By Gai. I will give you
de German Gut.

The Monster

Detected!



At Frisky Demon full of whim, by way of Change,
Ask'd not had leave, on Cath to Reign and range,
On this condition, that he'd undergo
All that we Mortals do, of Cliffs, or woe
One thing was needful, if he came and tarry'd,
A Maid was granted, and he must be Marry'd.
A Maid matured with every female Grace,
A Virgin Lady with a handsome face!
A little Dagger with a Tube, was fill'd
With juice of Plants, which such a Liquor yield,
That when to Woman's velvet Flesh apply'd,
It makes no Entrance if a Maid is try'd.
The Elastic Weapon, which before was stout,
Nor makes a wound, nor sends its juices to't,

But if that Virgin Treasures gone, no Art
Prevents the Gaping wound, then wnumid smart,
She had of Crafty Nick, to prove the Fair,
And wing'd his way thro' Father's parting Air.
To London come, he darts thro' every Street,
To find this Maid, to have his Scheme complete,
Takes all the Ladies, blooming fair and sleek,
The 'frighted Ladies Tremble, run and shriek,
But Ah! in vain they fly! in vain protection seek,
For he can run so swift, such different forms assume,
In vain to take him must the Men presume!
This Monster then, Who treats you so unkind,
This Cutting Monster Ladies, is the Devil!



ABOVE: A bawdy cartoon published at the height of the Monster-mania, showing a lady wearing protective gear being saved from the mystery assailant's rapier.

young and beautiful ladies made it highly fashionable to pose as one of his swooning, tearful victims, basking in the newspaper publicity and receiving visits from manly, muscular Monster-hunters eager to obtain a description of the mystery assailant.

At this stage, some newspaper journalists, aghast at the Monster they had helped to create, suggested that the attacks might well be the handiwork of some inept pickpockets, who were aiming to cut open the ladies' skirt pockets, but stabbed the flesh beneath instead. Such calls for moderation were lost in the general hubbub: it was instead speculated that the Monster was a master of disguise, an insane nobleman bent on maiming every beautiful woman in London, or even a supernatural being who could make himself invisible to evade detection. The catalogue of victims soon reached 50: some were cut with a sharp object, others kicked from behind with spikes fastened to the Monster's knees, and some stabbed in the nose with a stiletto hidden in a nosegay they were invited to smell by the elusive fiend.

THE MONSTER CAUGHT?

Finally, on 13 June, a man was arrested by the vigilante John Coleman after he had

It was speculated that the Monster was a master of disguise, an insane nobleman

been pointed out in Green Park by Anne Porter, a young lady who had been attacked by the Monster in January in front of Pero's Bagnio, 63 St James's Street, a tavern run by Miss Porter's father and also the family home.

The suspect was the 23-year-old Welshman Rhyndrick Williams, a native of Beguildy in the county of Radnor. The son of a respectable apothecary, he had become a ballet dancer, but was sacked from the theatre after being suspected of theft. The young Welshman then sank low in the London underworld, supporting himself by various odd jobs. For a few months, he

worked as an artificial flower maker at a factory owned by the seedy Frenchman Aimable Michelle, but by early 1790 he was unemployed and out on the street again. He lived at a disreputable public house, where four men shared two beds in a tiny room. That the Monster actually slept in the same bed as another man was considered highly significant in explaining his bloodthirsty crusade against the female sex.

When Williams was questioned at Bow Street, it was only with difficulty that the police prevented the mob from lynching him. Anne Porter, the Monster victim who had pointed out Williams in Green Park, was certain he was the man who had cut her. She was seconded by her three sisters, all of whom testified that the Welshman had been in the habit of stalking them in the streets, making use of the most horrid and insulting language. Several other Monster victims could not pick Williams out, however; others declared themselves certain he was not the man who had cut them.

In the meantime, the judges were contemplating for what crime Williams should be prosecuted. At this time, crimes were either felonies or misdemeanours. The former were 'serious' offences, punishable by death or transportation to the Australian

penal colonies. Misdemeanours were relatively milder offences, punishable by prison, pillory or a public flogging. To cut or stab some person with an intent to maim or kill them was a misdemeanour, and the judges were uneasily aware that the general mood in London demanded that the Monster should be severely punished. They found an ancient statute from the time of George I, intended to prevent weavers from destroying imported foreign clothes, saying that it was a felony to maliciously spoil and destroy any person's garments. Rhynwick Williams was tried at the Old Bailey and convicted for destroying the clothes of Anne Porter on 19 January 1791, in spite of an alibi provided by his fellow workers at the flower factory. The Judge, Sir Francis Buller, nevertheless found the stretching of the law to make the Monster's crimes a felony somewhat questionable: had he not cut the clothes to make way to the flesh underneath?

The matter was referred to the Twelve Judges of England, who decided that Rhynwick Williams should be tried again, this time for a misdemeanour. Although energetically defended by the eccentric Irish poet Theophilus Swift, who bullied Anne Porter and the other female witnesses

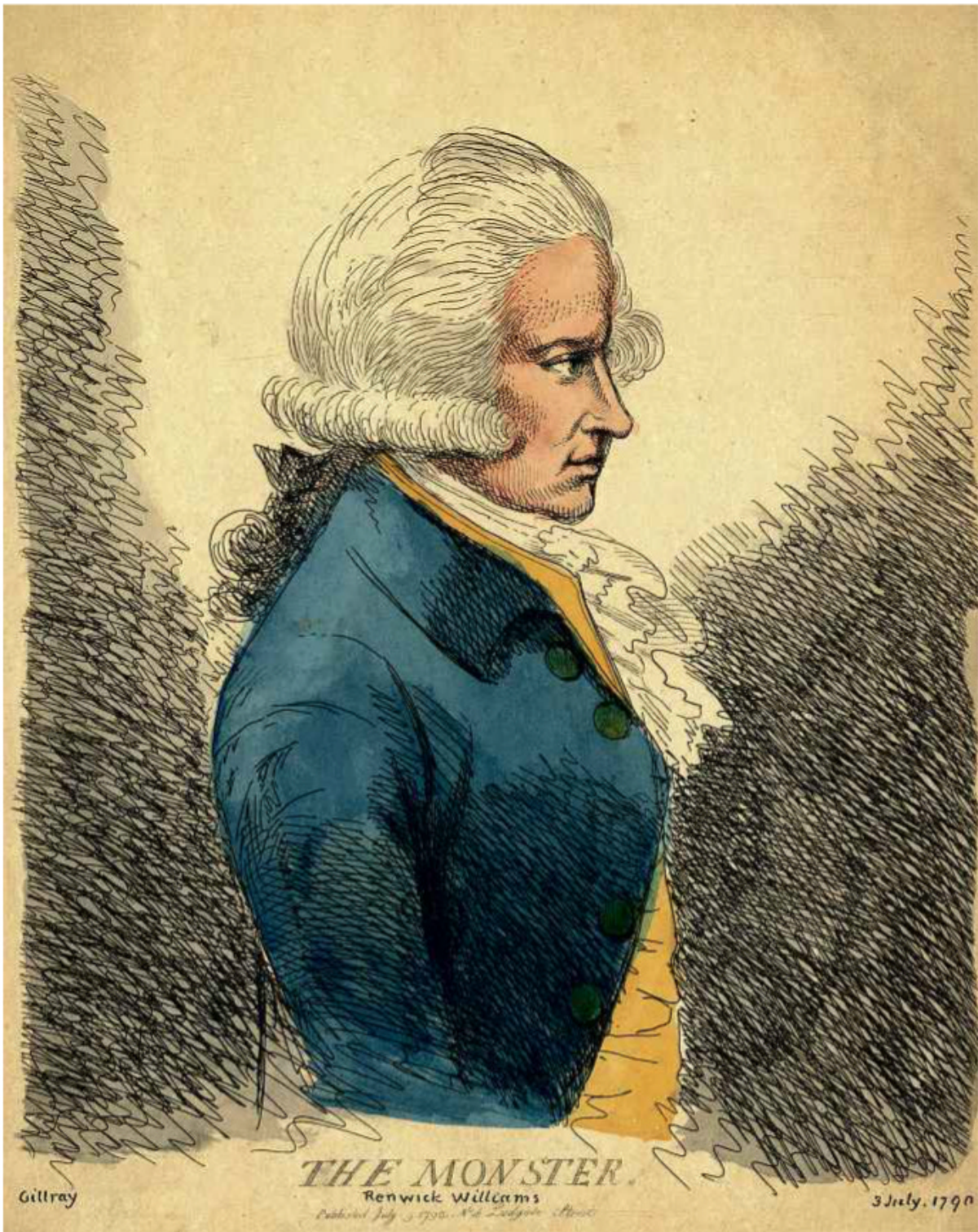


mercilessly, the young Welshman was again convicted and sentenced to six years in Newgate. The trials served as a ceremony of exorcism; there were no more attacks, and London had been cleansed of its Monster. At the time, many people saw it as an

anomaly that Williams was not hanged, flogged within inches of his life, or at least transported to Australia. After all, it was punishable by death to steal a sheep or to pickpocket more than a shilling. Today, one is instead concerned that



TOP: Two old maids are dreaming that the Monster will show them attention to prove that they are still attractive, when the fiend suddenly appears! **ABOVE:** The Monster cutting a lady in front of Mr Angerstein's front door, and another potential victim being fitted with protective gear.



TOP LEFT: Miss Anne Porter. TOP RIGHT: The Monster attacking the Porter sisters outside Pero's Bagnio. ABOVE: Rhynwick Williams drawn by James Gillray.

there may well have been a miscarriage of justice, and that Williams was just a scapegoat who had to play the role of the Monster in these two farcical trials. Many of the victims had given descriptions of the mystery assailant that did not fit Williams at all. And for the attack where the evidence against Williams was considered the strongest, he had seven alibi witnesses stating that he had been hard at work making artificial flowers at the time. The veracity of Anne Porter and her boyfriend John Coleman, who had caught Williams, was cast into doubt by Theophilus Swift, and it is certain that Coleman got his hands on the Monster reward and that he and Porter married not long after. There is also evidence that the police deliberately coached at least one Monster victim to pick out Williams as the man who had attacked them. It is thus quite possible that the Welshman was just a scapegoat, unlucky enough to fall into the hands of the authorities when they needed someone to pay for the Monster's crimes.

PHANTOM MENACE

The London Monster mania of 1790 is just one example of what can be called the phantom attacker syndrome (see FT131:32-38).

In 1819, Paris was terrorised by piqueurs who stabbed women in their behinds with sharp instruments attached to their umbrellas. The French police tried everything, even detectives in drag, to act as potential victims and flush out the culprits, but to no avail.

In 1938, the Halifax Slasher cut a number of people with razor blades. The newspapers were full of the Slasher's latest outrages, vigilantes roamed the streets, and the local women carried lengths of hosepipe filled with lead shot as protection against the mystery assailant. After the local police had declared themselves baffled, Scotland Yard was called in. The experienced detectives found that many Slasher victims had faked their own injuries to gain sympathy and recognition, just as at least one Monster victim had done in 1790. They declared themselves convinced that there had never been a Slasher: the whole thing was a typical example of how an urban community could react in an erratic and inexplicable way to an elusive outside threat (see FT131:35 and Michael Goss, *The Halifax Slasher: An Urban Terror in the North of England*, Fortean Times Occasional Paper, 1987).

These phantom attackers are still with us. In May 2001, speculation was rife in India after a mysterious being had attacked several people in or near New Delhi. The Monkey-Man, as he was soon dubbed, climbed the roofs and savaged people who were sleeping there; he swiftly bounded away if any person tried to grab him. There was speculation whether this threatening, sharp-clawed monster was an extraterrestrial, a mutant monkey escaped from a zoo, or a sadistic hoaxter dressed in a gorilla costume. There were soon more than 70 victims, and a reward of 50,000 rupees was posted for the capture of the Monkey-Man. Armed police patrolled the streets of New Delhi, vigilantes were out in force, and several innocent people were beaten up or lynched



ABOVE: A cartoon suggesting that Rhywnick Williams, shown in disguise and when attacking the Porter sisters, ought to be hanged for his crimes.

BELOW: Jan Bondeson in front of the present-day 63 St James's Street, site of the Pero's Bagnio attack on Ann Porter, in a still from the film *The London Monster*.



after being pointed out as the Monkey-Man. But when the case was properly investigated, it turned out to be yet another episode of mass hysteria: people had faked their injuries and invented sightings of the elusive attacker. Just like the Monster-Mania of 1790, the Monkey-Man scare died out as suddenly as it had begun (see FT148:8-9, 149:7; and for the Uttar-Pradesh 'monster-man', see FT163:7, 164:6).

Was there a Monster at all back in 1790, or was the entire scare just a case of mass hysteria? No woman was killed or seriously injured by the fiend and some alleged victims were proved to have faked their injuries. Other purported victims may well have been injured by clumsy pickpockets, as was suggested at the time. Rhywnick Williams might have been one of the roughs habitually insulting women in the London

streets, but he was hardly *the* Monster, if we judge by the disparity between the various descriptions of the prowling miscreant. It is obvious that there were several copycat Monsters at large, imitating the original attacker; this, in fact, constitutes the earliest known example of copycat crime.

The Monster-mania of 1790 has striking parallels with our own time: an inept police force unable to find its man, a 'moral entrepreneur' creating an urban panic by posting a huge reward, and a press frenzy that generated a climate of fear and a need to convict some person at all costs, even if the evidence was questionable.

♦ **JAN BONDESON** is a retired senior lecturer and consultant physician at Cardiff University. He is a regular contributor to *Fortean Times* and the author of many books on fortean subjects. His book *The London Monster: Terror on the Streets in 1790*, is available from the History Press.

♦ **DENNIS MOHR** is a Canadian documentary film producer and director of *The London Monster* documentary. The film was written by Calvin Campbell and voiced by Diarmid Mogg.

The London Monster is available to watch online at: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/londonmonster>

The Gaucho Also Cries

Director Alan Stivelman discusses his film *Witness of Another World*, which tells the true story of Juan Perez's 1978 close encounter, with **MARK PILKINGTON**

For many of those who experience them, UFO phenomena are about much more than just lights in the sky, so Argentinian filmmaker Alan Stivelman's thoughtful exploration of Juan Perez's 1978 close encounter near Venado Tuerto comes as a welcome surprise. By focusing on the emotional and psychological effects that the event had on the 12-year-old witness, the film moves beyond the usual binary arguments to remind us that an experience doesn't have to make sense – even within the generous parameters of the UFO field – to have a devastating, life-changing impact.



LEFT: Juan Perez (left) and Alan Stivelman enjoying a chat during the making of the film.

How did you discover Juan Pérez and his encounter?

I've always been interested in exploring the unknown, particularly all forms of religiosity. Like an annoying fly, the UFO phenomenon was always present, but I saw it as something too vulgar to be taken seriously.

Then, in 2014, I was writing a fictional story about an alien abduction and read *The Strangers*, a book about abductions in Argentina by a psychiatrist, Nestor Berlanda, and a clinical psychologist, Juan Acevedo. A year later, I met Berlanda at a screening of my previous movie, *Humano* – he approached as I was holding his book! From then on, we became friends and it was thanks to him that I was introduced to the life of Juan Perez.

Once I started reading more widely about UFO phenomena, everything changed, and today I have a superlative respect for it. But I feel we are too easily distracted by the material elements of the UFO story, and forget the psychological side.

Each culture, country, society, observes its reality in a particular way, as if glasses were placed before each person and they were observing life through those distorted magnifiers, and the same is true of their approach to UFOs. In South America, the phenomenon is perceived quite differently to the way it's seen in Europe, or particularly the United States, where there is a tendency to view everything as a conspiracy. More

“I wanted to help Juan understand why that contact happened to him”

than anything, this approach generates fear, which can be very damaging to the mind – perhaps this is the objective; I don't know. My key intentions with the film were to capture the human aspect of the phenomenon, its hidden face. I wanted to help Juan understand why that contact happened to him on a cold morning in 1978, to uncover the traumatic imprint of his experience and understand why he isolated himself for so many decades. What was he afraid of?

Juan comes across as a gentle, sensitive soul. What kind of person is he?

Juan is not the typical gaucho of the Argentinian pampas, where macho ideals of 'manliness' and senseless fights prevail. On the other hand, he honours that culture, because it's where he was raised by his beloved grandfather. Juan's passion has always been the countryside, nature and animals. His skill in taming horses brings

him closer to the 'gaucho', but his extreme sensitivity and innate sense of craftsmanship make him more of an artist, in my opinion. In one scene, Juan shares his tears with us and says: “The gaucho also cries.” A man has to express his pain, no matter how uncomfortable or inappropriate it seems on the surface.

Was there a tangible component to Juan's experience, or did it occur primarily within his own

consciousness? Or are such distinctions irrelevant here?

Juan has a scar on his arm from the contact he had with the “tall one”, a being he met on the craft. He says that for many years the wound was “open” and that a transparent liquid came out of it. Aged 18, Juan had a medical check-up for military service, which was obligatory at the time. The doctor asked him what the strange mark on his arm was and Juan innocently described his encounter in detail. Without saying a word the doctor stamped his record “unfit”, freeing him from military service!

But the strangest and saddest material fact of his contact was that Juan tied the reins of Comet, his horse, to the craft's “ladder”. Comet kicked the ship incessantly out of fear, injuring his leg, and died the next day.

There were three more such cases in the week of Juan's encounter, all within a two kilometre radius. I was able to interview Carlos, the town's carpenter, and Roberto, who was working in a bakery at the time; they had felt only terror in the presence of the unknown and fled the scene immediately.

But Juan wasn't afraid. Shamans travel to the other side to obtain information and powers, and there's a very concrete need to be able to make that journey. I think it would have been different for Roberto and Carlos if they'd faced their fears; perhaps they too would have obtained “gifts” from the other side, just as Juan obtained the gift



ABOVE: During Juan's close encounter he saw, and later entered, a UFO in the morning fog. His horse was injured during the incident, and subsequently died.

of clairvoyance. The shamanic world works that way.

Do you think there was something about Juan that made his experience unique to him? Perhaps his Guarani heritage, or something else?

One of the questions I asked myself when I was investigating the case was whether there was a relationship between the lineage of some of the contactees and the UFO phenomenon itself. I had the opportunity to meet Juan's mother before I started shooting. She's a very reserved woman, of Guarani shamanic descent. At that time she didn't like people visiting her son. She was afraid that, since he had been marked on his arm, he would be taken away by "the bugs". You could see the years of misunderstanding and terror, caused by the experience, in her face.

Eventually she confessed to me that she too had experienced contact when she was a child; the "bugs" had kidnapped her, hurt her, and taken her little dog. The description she gave me of the "tall being" was the same as Juan's. I didn't know what to say... then she continued to talk about something else entirely, as if nothing had happened. I realised then that their family was going through a trans-generational

trauma, that Juan's experience might just be the tip of the iceberg.

What drove Juan into his near 40-year retreat?

One of the things that Juan mentioned when describing his encounter is that at no time did he feel fear: he thought that what he was watching was a field tractor and its workers; he never thought they were beings from another planet or dimension.

The terror came after the contact. One of the consequences of the event was that he began to have premonitions, dreams about accidents, deaths, and other unfortunate episodes that would happen to close relatives and neighbours. He was horrified when he saw these events actually take place – he felt guilty that he couldn't avert them, though he was able to prevent a local child from drowning in a river.

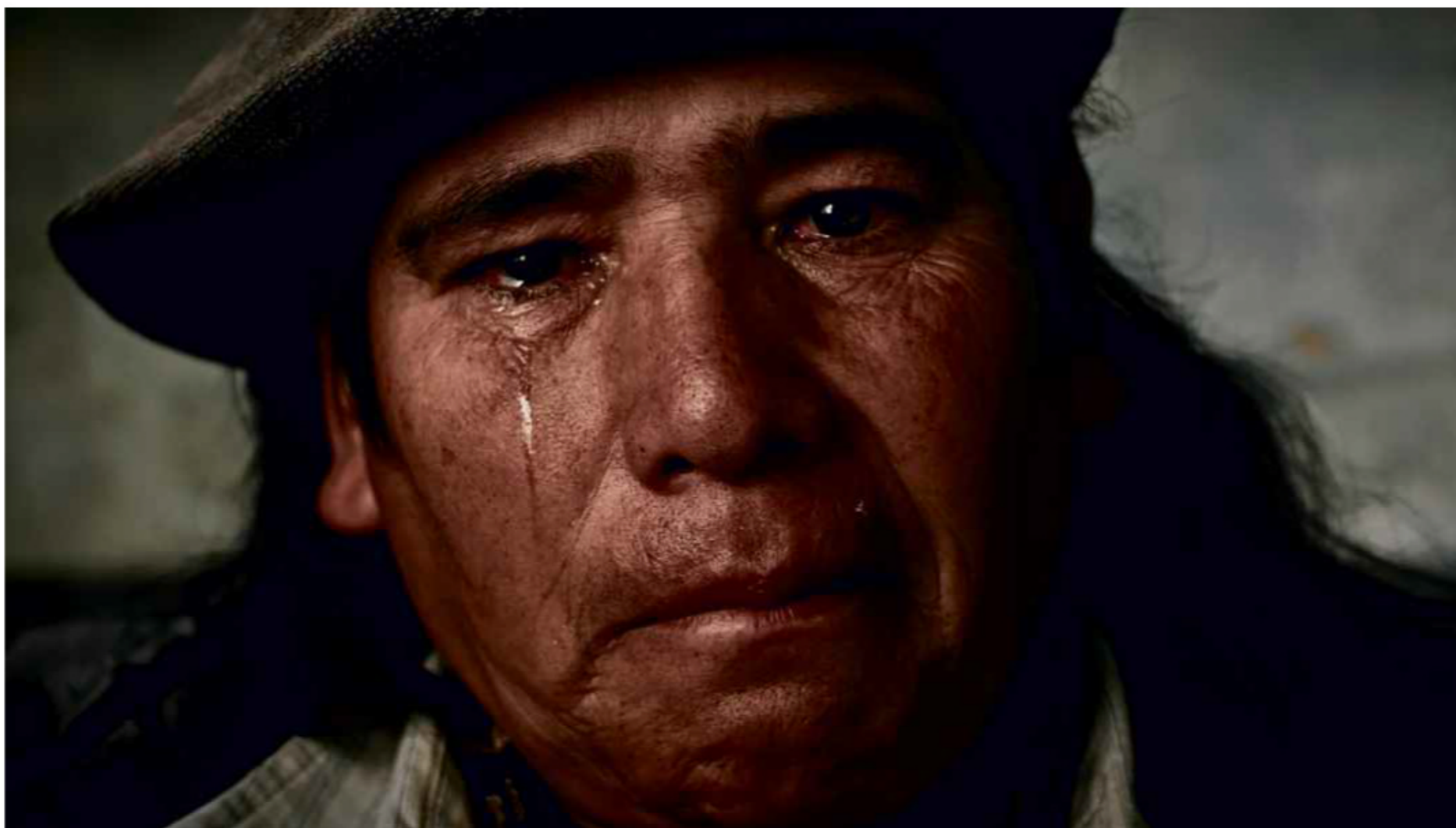
Through the process we initiated with the film, Juan learned that the Guarani tribal peoples – his and his mother's ancestral lineage – are characterised by their precognitive dreams. For them, dreams are the bridge to supra-sensitive worlds, and it's there that they come into contact with the divine. Without knowing of this tradition, it was through his UFO contact that Juan received the gift of clairvoyance from his

ancestors. For the Guarani community, these phenomena, including what we think of as UFOs, reside in the metaphysical world, which their shamans access through dreams.

1978 was the peak of Argentina's "Dirty War". It also coincided with what was probably the first synchronised global peak of interest in UFOs, with the release of Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (released in March 1978 in Argentina). During your reconstruction of Juan's experience you seem to hint at this with the use of the CE3K contact theme when the young Juan touches the craft.

1978 was a very turbulent year for Argentina. These times of crisis seem to be fertile ground for the phenomenon, resulting in waves of sightings, whether induced by human or perhaps non-human intelligences. It can be difficult to distinguish between them, though their psychological impacts can be equally powerful.

In Argentina there was a researcher who dismissed Juan's case, because he understood that "the beings" in the case resembled the robots R2D2 and C3PO from *Star Wars*. Juan and his family lived in rural isolation, and still do. They didn't go to the cinema, nor did they have access



ABOVE: “The gaucho also cries”. For Juan, telling his story after all these years has been both moving and therapeutic. **BELOW:** The young Juan (centre) pictured with UFO researcher Jacques Vallée (right), who investigated the case at the time and also appears in the film.

to science fiction literature. In the original reports of the case, Juan, when describing the object, said that he was seeing “a tractor”, “or a bright white house with a little hat”. He never said the word UFO or spaceship, he always just described something that was familiar to him. Could he have seen images from *Star Wars* in his school classes? Maybe. What happens to his case then? Would his testimony lose credibility?

In the film, we decided to focus exclusively on the psychological aspects of Juan’s experience. We don’t know for sure what happened to him. But we do know that the trauma which haunted him for over four decades was real.

How has Juan responded to the film? Where is he now?

The film had a therapeutic effect on Juan, on his family, and on the general audience. For instance, Juan’s mother was able to tell him about her own childhood encounter for the first time.

Juan watched the film several times, often with an audience. After 40 years of rejection, it was healing for him to see how people embraced him, often moved to tears by his story. At the first screening in his hometown of Venado Tuerto, half the audience were family members. Afterwards they hugged



and kissed him, tearfully apologising for not having understood what he’d been through.

Now that he knows where his roots are he hopes one day to visit the Guaraní communities, but for now he lives in the countryside, at his parents’ house. He decided that he wants to look after them, to make up for lost time. There were many years of loneliness, where contact with his relatives was sporadic and he felt like a stranger to them. Now he’s part of his family again, taking care of them and his animals, in a quiet, natural rhythm of life.

Outside of the UFO or indigenous/shamanic communities, there don’t seem to be many options for people seeking to make sense of such overwhelming encounter experiences.

It’s important that we can all benefit from experiences like Juan’s, especially within the scientific and mental health communities. Many people have had experiences that are difficult to describe, and are reluctant to talk about them because of the lingering social stigma around “the unknown”.

What would have happened to Juan if he’d been born in Buenos Aires, New York or London? What would the experience of going to an orthodox psychiatrist have been like? Would he still be living in freedom or would he be confined to a

mental hospital? These were the questions I repeatedly asked myself while working on the film.

So one of the aims of the movie is to be able to go to those territories – beyond ufology, beyond science. I have great faith that art can be an agent of change in the way we understand the world around us.

Witness of Another World (reviewed **FT390:63**) is available on most streaming platforms, including Amazon, Google Play, iTunes, Vimeo and Fandango.

◆ **MARK PILKINGTON** is an FT alumnus who writes on culture and *fortean* and is the founder of Strange Attractor Press. He’s the author of *Mirage Men* and *Far Out: 101 Strange Tales From Science’s Outer Edge*.

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BLITHE SPIRITS

THE TRICKSTER AND THE POLTERGEIST

In an extract from his new book *Blithe Spirits: An Imaginative History of the Poltergeist*, **SD TUCKER** compares the noisy ghost to the age-old mythological figure of the Trickster, and asks what such entities are trying to tell us through their mischievous pranks. Could it be that these spooks have a sense of humour?

"I wrote a book about poltergeists. It flew off the shelves." Jack Dee

We do not think of ghosts as being funny. Scary? Yes. Mysterious?

Of course. And yet we are not accustomed to thinking of them as being humorous. When it comes to that specific, well-known sub-category of noisy spirit we call the poltergeist, this feeling is heightened. Poltergeists smash things to bits, set fires, keep households up at night with loud bangings and rappings, throw stones at people, even on occasion physically assault them; and there seems nothing very funny about any of that. Then again, think of Hallowe'en, and trick-or-treaters. They smash things up, throw eggs at cars and houses, strew toilet rolls across trees and gardens, hurl stones and shatter windows, shove unpleasant substances through letter-boxes and even, occasionally, go so far as to set things alight. This also isn't terribly funny – if you're on the wrong end of it. The kids responsible would disagree. It's funny to them. Maybe it is to the poltergeist, too.

When we read of a case from 1649, when parliamentary officials sent out to survey a property in Oxfordshire witnessed a stinking tub of green and foetid ditchwater flying into the air and then upending itself onto their heads, it is hard not to visualise the scene and laugh: it's pure slapstick. When we then read that horse bones began materialising in thin air and whizzing around the place, and that someone glimpsed "the similitude of a hoof" disappearing through a doorway, and encounter the possibility that, perhaps, it was a *dead horse* playing all these tricks, we are apt to snigger again. It just sounds



LEFT: Poltergeist phenomena in Cideville, France, 1850-51, a case which also involved a supposed hex.

Woodstock haunting was all just a very human fraud, as has been suggested, then it is still a comic story, whether a real ghost lay behind it or not. One contemporary account spoke of "Strange Pranks plaid by the Devil" and you can certainly see why.

Are all such ghosts merely jokers? They sound less like terrifying demons, and more like mischievous children; which is why the mediaeval writer William of Auvergne called such beings *joculares* and *joculatares*, meaning 'pranksters'. Advocating the literal existence of disembodied souls after death, some theorists have naturally drawn the obvious conclusion that dead, invisible toddlers are responsible for the many childish pranks of poltergeistery.

Consider the wonderfully outré haunting of a Scottish garage at Innerleithen

between 2005 and 2009, where many of the phenomena centred upon the child-friendly sweets on sale; hundreds of Smarties would go whirling through the air like a swarm of chocolatey bees, while water would appear in mid-air before splashing down onto people's heads (or else fall to the floor in *square* puddles). The unseen ghost would frequently laugh at the trouble it caused, and make animal-noises on the forecourt like a boisterous toddler. It also developed an "articulate, child-like" disembodied voice, all of which led understandably to the on-the-spot conclusion that the polt was the returning spirit of a five-year-old girl called Beth. But are such theories correct? In attempting to explain the poltergeist, in any universal sense, it may be that you

Whatever they truly are, these things should not be trusted

too absurd for words. When we later discover that the parliamentary agents were so disturbed by such ridiculousness that they fled the house, more amusement arises; agents of authority have been undermined, pomposity and power pricked. Even if the

are actually attempting to *explain away* the phenomenon. I do not think that poltergeists are, in any complete and literal sense, the spirits of the dead, fairies, psychic emissions from the brains of their victims, demons or devils, or the funny tricks of naughty little children, as is often claimed. You can find some individual cases wherein any of the above categories seem to explain events quite fully; and yet, you will never be able to shelter *all* outbreaks of poltergeist activity under any such single umbrella. As one poltergeist caught on tape once admitted: “I’m a mirror.” That is, the individual theorist can very often end up seeing little but himself and his own theories being reflected reassuringly back to him in such entities.

Whatever they truly are, these things should not be trusted. In 1990, the McWethey family of the tiny Oklahoma hamlet of Centrahoma began suffering the unwelcome attentions of a stone-throwing spook, which, after learning to speak English by watching TV shows (or so it said), developed a metallic-sounding voice. It made threats such as “I’m going to paint your birds”, before throwing food colouring from the kitchen all over the McWetheys’ parakeets, staining their feathers most motley. Then, it began claiming to hail from Saturn; the ghost had landed nearby in a flying saucer, it said, and been abandoned by its crewmates. To ‘prove’ this tale, it pressed down some grass in the rough shape of a crop-circle, and drew the astronomical symbol for Saturn on mirrors with lipstick. And yet, for an alien, it gave an unusually Earth-like name: Michael Dale Sutherland. How did the McWetheys account for such inconsistencies? “Course, he lies a lot,” was the best explanation offered. So do they all. Tricksters always have.

TRICKY CHARACTERS

Following the release of the parapsychologist George P Hansen’s marvellous 2001 book *The Trickster and the Paranormal* (see **FT175:40-41, 334:56-57**), there has been increasing recognition of the relevance of the Trickster figure of world mythology and culture to the field of the paranormal, and in my new book, *Blithe Spirits*, I have set out to apply this insight specifically to the field of the poltergeist. Poltergeists, I have found, are best thought of as a form of Trickster phenomena.

The Trickster is that strange and wonderful figure found in all of world folklore and myth, from the Norse Loki to the Robin Goodfellow and Puck of the English, to China’s King Monkey and the Raven, Blue-Jay, Spider and Coyote of the various Native American peoples. We might also mention Brer Rabbit, Reynard the Fox, Odysseus, the baby Krishna and even the Devil himself, frequently depicted in folktales as a paradoxically powerful simpleton just waiting to be fooled or cheated by his intended dupes, the Prince of Lies successfully lied to by others. In later literature, he might be identified in



ABOVE: An archetypal trickster in modern guise – Tom Hiddleston as Loki in *Thor: The Dark World*.

the stock shapes of Pícaro, Harlequin and Machiavel, or in the more specific guises of Melville’s *Confidence Man* or Dostoyevsky’s *Idiot*. TV viewers may even have laughed along with him dressed up as Arthur Daley, Bart Simpson or Sergeant Bilko. Like the poltergeist, and like the travelling con-man he so resembles, the Trickster has many faces – and yet he is easily identifiable behind all these masks due to the essential way he behaves. Often considered, in his original mythological shape, to be an allegorical personification of the mind of early man, he is a sort of half-human, half-animal creature, or often a talking animal with a human brain, who plays various half-hideous, half-amusing tricks upon both man and beast, commonly to his own ultimate disadvantage – or, in other words, an early version of Gef the Talking Mongoose, perhaps, for all those familiar with this long-time *FT*-favourite spook (see **FT269:32-39**).

A mix-and-match list of common characteristics of Trickster figures might include the following: they are liars, thieves and con-men, engaging in habitual acts of deceit; possessing powers of prophecy, their predictions may be either true or false, or something in-between; they display a sense of humour, often of an extreme, bizarre or sick nature; they are part-human, part-animal in form, whether mentally, physically or both; they can be unpredictably violent

or murderous; they display an uninhibited or perverted sense of sexuality, being obsessed with substances like fæces, semen and blood; they cross over into the lands of the dead and the gods; they are great traversers of boundaries; they display both extreme intelligence and extreme stupidity, often simultaneously; they violate taboos and disrupt the natural order of things, becoming situation-inverters, sometimes for good, sometimes for ill; they are inherently paradoxical and contrarian in nature; doing things in a somehow backwards fashion, they act as parodies of the natural order of things, embodying the old saying ‘*Demon est Deus inversus*’, or ‘the Devil is God upside-down’; they are frequently irreligious, having an avowed disrespect for authority; they are illogical in nature; they commonly seem insane and undifferentiated in their mentality; they are ambiguous, anomalous, oxymoronic and fundamentally confusing, often being two mutually contradictory things at once, kind and cruel, physical and non-physical, visible and invisible, male and female, real and non-real; they are shape-shifters and masters of disguise; they are greedy and have uncontrollable appetites, being in many ways childlike; they often have little regard for linear time, and may be able to alter or dissolve its usual rules; they are creative inventors with an innate facility for recombining things in unusual ways; they

AF ARCHIVE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

are kings of wordplay; and finally, of course, they don't like obeying rules, so sometimes Tricksters might not possess many of the above-cited qualities at all...

As archetypal figures, Tricksters are best thought of as being constellations of personality properties which cluster together; where one appears, you are more likely to get some of the others showing up too, thereby strengthening the overall archetype. A con-man has to be a good liar, for instance; and, habitually seducing people with his words, he may also be a good lover. The psychology of the Trickster figure as outlined above, I would submit, is very similar indeed to the psychology of the average poltergeist, as anybody who has ever encountered or read about such *joculatares* will surely know.

HERMES ALWAYS DELIVERS

How best to interpret this inherently bewildering figure? Possibly, via the judicious use of hermeneutics. The term 'hermeneutics' was coined eponymously after possibly the greatest Trickster of them all: Hermes, messenger of the Greek gods (known in ancient Rome as 'Mercury'). The name 'Hermes' originally meant 'he of the stone-heap', or boundary and crossroads-marking cairn, which structure, according to Trickster scholar Lewis Hyde, was "an altar to the forces that govern these spaces of heightened uncertainty, and to the intelligence needed to negotiate them". Hermes being the god of boundaries sounds counterintuitive, until you consider that he allowed those same boundaries to be broken and then recreated in some new and novel fashion. In this way, such Trickster gods were also gods of creativity itself.

Meaning 'the art of interpretation', hermeneutics allows anything to be considered a 'text' to be read, and its meaning thereby changed. This enables anything so analysed to become like the words in a poem, which embody both a literal meaning and a subjective, wider meaning beyond the literal. The poltergeist is similar: he changes his form and meaning too, apparently in response to the promptings and prejudices of his observers. Do you want him to be a demon? No problem. Do you want him to be an angel? No worries there, either. Like that arch-Trickster Groucho Marx, he has his principles and, if you don't like them – well, he has others. Therefore, if you want to develop your skills in hermeneutics outside the realms of poetry and art, the poltergeist provides as good a test of your abilities as anything else.

With this in mind, we should ask what was the wider function of Hermes's sacred stone-heap, back in the days when the Greeks



LEFT: The unfortunate McWethey family pictured shortly after the strange attacks in their Oklahoma home began; some of the stones and coins hurled by the polt are shown in the bottom photograph.



'ithyphallic' – they bore a representation of Hermes's erect penis.

You could find such herms at crossroads, atop hills or mountains, at the borderline of woods and forests, at the limit between one village's territory and the next, or at the entrance to a house; all places where it was natural for commerce between different groups to take place. Hermes became cast as both 'god of roads' and 'god of doors', as it was at such borderland zones that people from one clan, family or village met those from another clan, family or village, to exchange goods, services, money and mates; or, when things went wrong, to exchange blows. Clearly, commerce with the outside world was considered potentially dangerous – hence the need for Hermes's magical protection in such areas – yet also potentially beneficial, hence the presence of his rock-hard hard-on. Hermes's phallus didn't just point the way to the next convenient market-place, it also signified the potential for creative fertility which existed wherever it was that insider-groups met and intermingled with outsider-groups, there to engage in all the necessary forms of social intercourse which made civilisation possible. Clear and stable boundaries

are necessary, but so is their penetration; if commerce is ever to occur, then men must strap on Mercury's winged sandals and travel. The Greek words for 'buy' and 'do business' were both derived from the same root-word, meaning 'beyond' or 'across'. Good fences do indeed make good neighbours, but only if they also have good gates.

However, in the ancient world the sense of potential danger when approaching a boundary-marking herm was felt acutely. As a result, a primitive form of commerce known as 'silent trade' emerged, in which one party would approach a herm, leave an offering of goods, retreat to a safe distance, then return later on to find that some other, equally nervous fellow from the next village had left them something in return. Later, goods might be replaced with sums of money. This way, neither unknown trader would be tempted to stab the other in a sudden bout

Objects moved, suitcases packed and unpacked themselves

still wore sandals? Tricksterishly enough, they possessed several differing, though complementary, purposes simultaneously. Originally, these 'herms', as they were called, were simply piled-up cairns, marking paths and natural boundaries, but over time they acquired the shape of square-cut blocks surmounted with a carving of the god's head. These blocks were of a type termed

of suspicious terror. Originally, it is guessed, offerings of food would be placed by cairns for Hermes, then eaten by hungry passers-by, thus indicating to believers that the sacrifice had been accepted – like parents eating mince-pies left out for Santa. This free food was considered a lucky windfall of the road, a theft Hermes would have blessed, as pilfering unattended fare was exactly what *he* would have done under such circumstances. A useful social fiction then emerged: that the food, money and goods found at boundary-marking herms were not really left there by your fellow trade-seeking human beings at all, but were supernatural gifts from the area’s governing god. These lucky finds were deemed nothing less than *hermaions*, or ‘Gifts from Hermes’; and there is a real parallel to be drawn between them and a regular subset of poltergeistery known collectively as JOTTS, or JOTTles.

SECRET SANTA

The acronym ‘JOTT’ means ‘Just One of Those Things’, and is used to refer to the unusual appearance or disappearance of small objects like coins, pens and (in particular) keys. Whenever you misplace your glasses and then, after many hours of searching, find them sitting in plain sight in the middle of your desk exactly where you left them, then that’s one type of JOTT. Or when you stroll into the kitchen and find a £10 note lying, plain as day, in the middle of the floor, with no clue where it came from, then that’s another type of JOTT. Or they are to some people. Most of us fortunate enough not to live within haunted homes would ascribe such ‘mysterious’ occurrences to ordinary absent-mindedness. There have even been sad cases in which elderly alleged polt-victims, subjected to repeated JOTTling, were later diagnosed as actually having Alzheimer’s disease. Some JOTTs, however, are far stranger...

Gifts of Hermes can also be verbal in nature, as with what we now call ‘Freudian Slips’, where a speaker exposes their true feelings by accidentally saying something like ‘I really must get around to *killing* my mother’ instead of ‘I really must get around to *calling*’ her. Such truths can be hidden not only from others but also from the tongue-tripping speaker himself, meaning that such (un)happy accidents were once considered akin to spontaneous oral prophecies, gifts of knowledge, unexpected and unasked-for, straight from the heights of Olympus (or the depths of Hades). Acts of divination operated



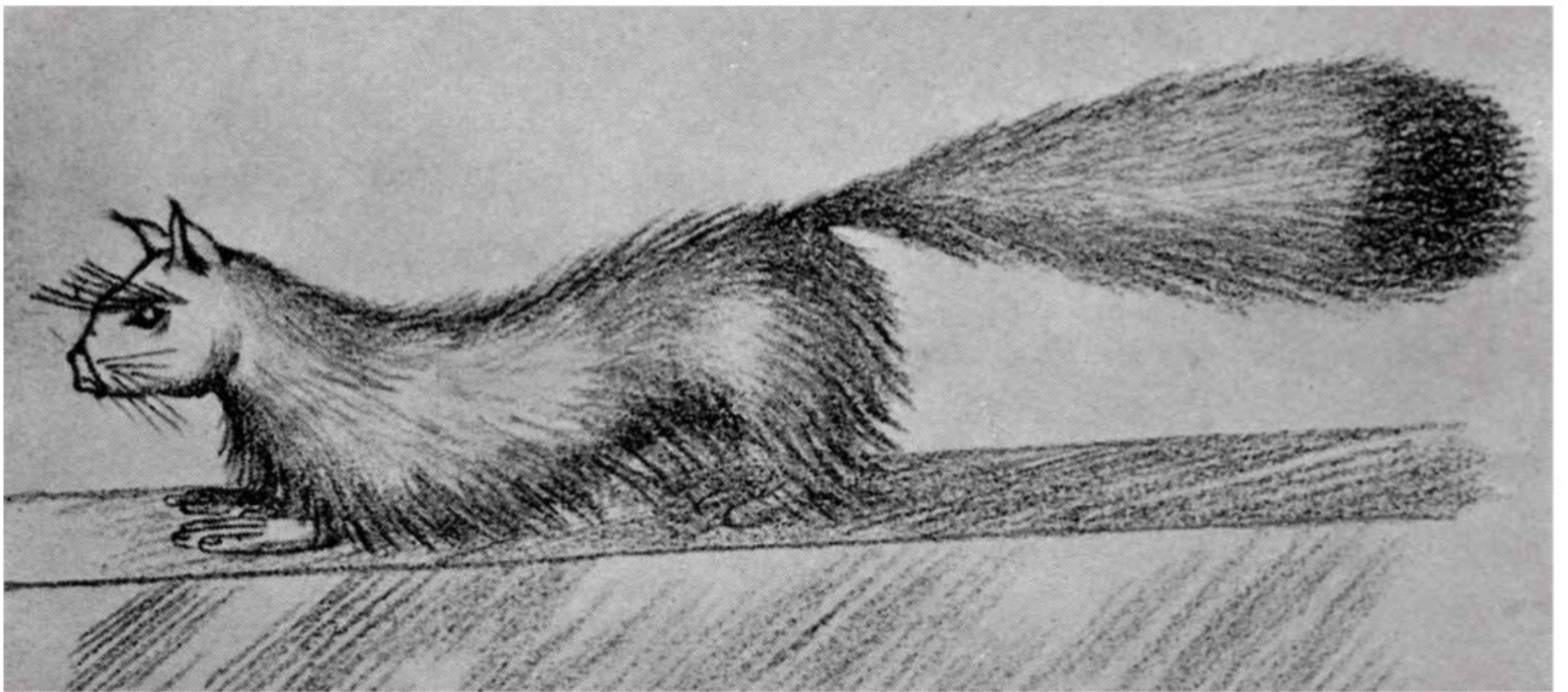
LEFT: A bronze Greek herm, from around 490 BC.

Uniquely, the poltergeist would even complete their crosswords! Hermes then devised some cryptic clues of his own in the shape of a veritable tidal wave of JOTTs. Old watches and necklaces, lost by Elizabeth years beforehand, turned up in sealed jars and cake tins, laid out like silent trade offerings on the floor. These items were described as looking “almost as if they were presents” – which, I think, they were. According to one account: “They would be found in the house after coming home from work or after getting up in the morning [and] included: a three-tier plastic table for plants; plants for the garden; mail-order items they did not order and which were unreturnable; a camera; a set of suitcases; a fox ornament; a small green turtle ornament; coloured balls for the dog; a plastic Christmas pudding; a radio; a black jacket for Elizabeth (her size); many presents under both their pillows; and, recently, a *Flintstones* T-shirt for Jerry ... [and] chocolate bars in the fridge.”

on the principle that the patterns cast by the dice or bones thrown by the Greek or Roman soothsayer were not actually random in nature, as they appeared to the untutored eye, but instead revealed the hidden will of the gods, particularly the will of Hermes, god of dice; and so it was with verbal slips. When Hermes causes what *appear* to be linguistic mishaps, therefore, he is really revealing what already lies within the will of Heaven and within the mind of the speaker alike. Similarly, during poltergeist hauntings the chance finding of those modern-day *hermaions* known as JOTTs can oftentimes reveal what already lies hidden within the mind of the finder. Many JOTTles, it could be argued, are the physical equivalent of Freudian slips.

After floating through the keyhole of their Hertfordshire home in June 1991, Hermes the passer of barriers began delivering some very enigmatic messages indeed to a married couple named Jerry and Elizabeth. Objects moved, suitcases packed and unpacked themselves, photos turned back-to-front on walls, plants uprooted spontaneously in the garden, letters returned from within post boxes and, on occasion, the entire house would shake for no apparent reason. Odder still, Jerry and Elizabeth would watch helpless while shoes filled with water right before their eyes, or the apparitional paw of a cat poked up through their bed covers.

In return for these random *hermaions*, just like an unseen Greek tradesman at a boundary-marking herm, the poltergeist took little offerings of its own in return – most commonly, cottage cheese spirited away from the fridge, or sometimes quantities of actual cash. Repeatedly, money vanished from Elizabeth’s person, leaving her stranded travelling to or from work; once, she was fined for fare-dodging when, after boarding her train, she proved unable to pay the ticket inspector. Jerry had no such problems, and was forced to meet her at the station with his own full wallet after work each evening, with the pickpocket polt virtually confining Elizabeth to the house without him. What obscure message was Hermes seeking to impart? Realising the crossword-loving spook could write, Jerry tried to find out, leaving notes asking “What can we do to appease?” The ghost tucked a reply inside one of Jerry’s shoes: “You [can] fuck off,” it said. Jerry received many similarly abusive missives. “Thoughtless bastard,” read one. “Get stuffed. You’ll pay” and “You’ll learn when it’s too late,” read others. On vacation, Jerry opened his choice of holiday reading only to find the instruction “Stay there, bastard” scribbled inside. When Jerry bought Elizabeth a poetry collection, the ghost warned, “Don’t give – Elizabeth hates poetry books!” on the flyleaf. To the case’s investigators, Jerry



ABOVE: Gef, the talking mongoose. **BELOW:** Prints left by the notoriously tricky man-weasel appeared to have been produced by three different animals.

later admitted that he and his wife were having certain relationship issues, tellingly observing that the polt always “took her side” in their arguments, and that “the abuse I get [in its notes] is just a reflection of her language” during such tiffs.

Maybe the constant JOTTs were paranormal peace-offerings from one spouse to another, or else hints from Elizabeth to her dozy husband about the kinds of gifts she would *rather* receive from him: perhaps chocolates or clothes, as opposed to slim volumes of verse. One theory advanced was that the theft of Elizabeth’s money was forcing her to stay at home with her husband more, and even to travel to and from work with him, thus ensuring they spent more quality time together, giving them an opportunity to talk through their issues. Hermes’s first silent theft occurred when the couple were out and about, had an argument, and Jerry decided to just drive home; but he couldn’t, because his car keys disappeared – only to drop to the floor months later inside the spare bedroom. Among those who believe in the ‘RSPK’ (Recurrent Spontaneous Psycho-Kinesis) hypothesis – namely, that polts are personified manifestations of psychic forces being emitted inadvertently from within their victims’ brains – many find much solace in such phenomena: according to this view, either the henpecked husband was trying to control his wife via RSPK-enabled JOTTling, or the resentful wife was trying to control her husband via the same method, or perhaps some destructive combination of the two. Eventually, Elizabeth was diagnosed with cancer and died; and so, at precisely the same time, did the marital poltergeist.

GEF THE TALKING MONGOOSE

But what message, in a wider sense, is the poltergeist trying to send out towards those

Was Gef somehow more than one animal at once, like a Trickster?



of us who see fit to pay heed and consider it? In essence, I think poltergeists function best of all as agents of *aporia*, or unsolvable paradox; the term, another Greek one, means something like ‘impassible barrier’ or ‘blocked passageway’, a realm through which logic cannot pass. Take the example of Gef the Talking Mongoose, possibly the weirdest poltergeist (if that’s what he really was) of all time. Surely Gef’s absurd adopted mask was an obvious case of ghostly identity fraud, but what I find most interesting are the abortive and highly Trickster-like attempts he made to prove the reality of his presence. For example, there were the hairs he left on the mantelpiece for the Irvings (the isolated Manx farming family he haunted)

to take away as evidence – and which, upon testing, proved to have come from the family dog. The one identity Gef straddled most expertly of all was that between real and inexplicable occurrence and blatant and laughable fakery. Consider the prints Gef allegedly left behind him one day. Casts were sent to the Natural History Museum in London for analysis, and the results were extremely confusing. There were three sets, each produced by a different animal. One set belonged to a dog; the second were from a North American raccoon, a creature not frequently observed on the Isle of Man; the third set was of indeterminate origin, but, said the Museum, definitely did not come from a mongoose. Here, the plot merely thickens – what *was* Gef, then? A pathetic human hoax? Or was he somehow more than one ‘animal’ at once, like many a classical Trickster? And where did that damned raccoon come from? The conundrum just gets deeper and deeper. These tracks lead us on not into the lair of the mystery beast, as you might initially expect, but instead much farther away from it than we ever were.

There is a direct mythological parallel for all this: that of Hermes and his theft of Apollo’s sacred cattle. The c. 420 BC *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* informs us that Hermes magically reversed these animals’ hooves, tied myrtle and tamarisk-leaves to the soles of his sandals, and then walked backwards across a sandy beach with the stolen livestock, leaving behind deliberately perplexing footprints to obscure the path of his escape. Hermes did well to leave some evidence of his passage behind for Apollo to find, rather than none at all, with such confusingly contrived tracks, so akin to those of Gef, disguising far more than they revealed. According to Lewis Hyde, with such misleading prints Hermes “confuses polarity. It is as if, lost in the woods, you took

out a compass and the needle spun aimlessly instead of pointing north. You could not then get oriented or find a path; you could not proceed. In this way, confounded polarity makes the world unpassable and is a kind of *aporia*... When Apollo comes upon the tracks that Hermes and the cattle leave, he is stopped in his own tracks, unable to move.” With that memorable phrase, “confounded polarity”, Hyde seems inadvertently to have hit upon an excellent description of the poltergeist. If something’s polarity is confounded, then it is neither one thing nor the other – neither North nor South, East nor West. The poltergeist is much more like the centre of the compass, where all points converge, than it is any individual direction in and of itself; not unlike Gef’s paw-prints, which were not just mongoose, dog, or raccoon, but, rather, an inextricable tamarisk-tangle of disparate and apparently incompatible elements. So are poltergeists. They are not ‘just’ dead people, psychic emissions from disturbed brains, fairies, demons, elementals or aliens from Saturn named Michael Dale Sutherland. From examining the contradictory evidential tracks they leave behind them, nobody knows precisely what they are... other than massive Tricksters.

In legend, Apollo is credited with the

ability to infallibly read signs and portents – to see immediately what it means when a bird drops dead from the sky and to use this knowledge to predict future events. Apollo, it has been said, is a skilled reader or *decoder*, but Hermes is an equally skilled writer or *encoder*, whose messages are often impossible even for his knowledgeable brother to properly decipher. The Apollonian mindset of our currently prevailing social dominant of scientism, just like its presiding Solar god, also claims to be able to ‘read’ everything in Creation, in the sense of being able to explain and account for it all. But can it really? Not when it comes to the poltergeist. If we look for definite answers in relation to polts then, just like Apollo when faced with Hermes’s incomprehensible tracks, we are left with no option but to pause befuddled for a moment and to admit that, if we’re being honest with ourselves, we really don’t know in which direction to turn next in search of an answer.

Lost in the woods of logic, alone and confused, we have fallen victim once again to the pranks of the Trickster, every bit as much as our Hermes-haunted ancestors once did. My book is dedicated to all those who are *tetelesmenoi Hermei* – fully initiated, like Gef’s bewildered Manx victims, into the Mysteries of Hermes.



***Blithe Spirits: An Imaginative History of the Poltergeist* by SD Tucker is published by Amberley in March (ISBN: 978144566728-7), RRP £16.99.**

♦ SD TUCKER is an *FT* regular who has long been obsessed with both poltergeists and Trickster-figures, and has always thought fortaean phenomena to be equally ‘funny peculiar’ and ‘funny ha-ha’. His latest book is *Blithe Spirits* and his many others include *Quacks!*, *False Economies*, *Forgotten Science*, *Terror of the Tokoloshe* and *The Hidden Folk*. His own favourite god is Hermes, not Apollo.

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ABOVE: The sneaky Hermes makes off with Apollo’s sacred cattle, magically reversing their hooves and leaving behind a set of perplexing prints as a hermeneutic challenge to his fellow god.

THAT HAUNTING MELODY

Just in time for Record Store Day, collector **GRAHAM SHARPE** follows his obsession with vinyl into the weird world of haunted record shops, possessed CD players and discs of the dead

Tuesday 21 November 2017 was the day on which I heard my first ghost story relating to a record shop.

I've always been fascinated by strange phenomena, and also by record shops, but I'd never expected to find a direct link between these two interests. In hindsight, considering the number of departed, often tormented, souls whose musical outpourings are preserved on vinyl and sporadically set free to inveigle their way into the ears and minds of captive audiences, perhaps it is not so surprising.

Record shops, by their nature, are full of the ghosts of deceased artists who made the music contained in the album grooves. They are reborn every time someone picks up, plays or discusses one of their records. They are all around you as you peruse the shelves and racks.

BANGS IN BUSHEY

Second Scene is a record shop in Bushey, near Watford, selling mostly second-hand vinyl. I was standing in the upstairs room where the events occurred, having been invited to look at the massive store of albums kept there by the owner, Julian Smith. From neatly filed multiple copies of middle-of-the-road discs by Perry Como and Jim Reeves, through A to Zs of rock, jazz, soul and reggae, to an impressive stash of Beatles' LPs (with copies of their *White Album* almost certainly filed in descending order of cover number), the wall-to-wall shelving was clearly just a few singles away from buckling under the huge weight.

Julian had invited me up to look at an item he had acquired – an original 1960s green dartboard bearing the name and image of The Beatles – together with (importantly, as they completed the set) a number of matching green darts, which, he told me, had impressed Bonhams auction house to the tune of four figures when he'd sought a valuation.

As we chatted, I mentioned that I had put some of my records, books and other memorabilia into a forthcoming auction and delved into my bag to show him the



LEFT: Julian outside his Second Scene record shop. BELOW: The upper room, now used for storing records.

catalogue – only to pull out by mistake my latest copy of, believe it or not, *Fortean Times*. Julian pointed at it and said: “The type of things they write about in that magazine have happened here.”

I looked around a tad nervously, so dramatically had his mood changed: he'd gone from genial Julian to a man with a serious, almost apprehensive look on his face.

“It happened when my wife Helen and I were actually living upstairs above the shop. This was our living room, packed with records of course, and over there” – he pointed to a door in the corner of the room – “was our bedroom.”

“I was in here, rather like today, showing records to a friend, when there was a really loud, prolonged noise out of nowhere, which neither of us could account for. It definitely

wasn't traffic noise – we are bang on a busy road here, so we hear that all the time – and it wasn't an aeroplane flying overhead. You recognise these sounds – it was neither.

“But it was *so* loud that it stopped us in our tracks, and I can only explain it by saying it was as though time had stood still. Eventually, as things returned to normal, we looked at each other and could only ask, ‘What was that all about?’”

This hadn't been the first such incident, though. “Helen and I were in bed one night when we both saw a green glow in one corner of the room where we had no light or lamp. There was nowhere it could be coming from. It spooked the pair of us. We just dived under the covers and didn't come out until morning.”

There were more incidents, and Julian remembered that the previous occupant of the house had vacated the premises at very short notice, leaving behind personal possessions that included a Ouija board and other ephemera associated with contacting spirits.



“Okay, it also transpired that she was behind with the rent, so she may have done a bunk for financial reasons; but she was never heard of again, never got in touch with anyone associated with the property. And why would she disappear completely and never come back for any of her stuff?”

There is no doubt that Julian was unnerved by these experiences.

GHOSTS OF THE CIVIL WAR

Perhaps the American equivalent of Second Scene’s haunting is the famous Ernest Tubb Record Shop in downtown Nashville, Tennessee. During the American Civil War, the building was used as a hospital and it is said that several Civil War ghosts have haunted the shop. Another legend has it that the store once boasted a haunted CD player that started playing the music of a performer when that artist was being discussed.

Employee Kelly Keene believed the shop’s long-time home on Broadway to be haunted, and music writer Eileen Sisk blogged about being groped by a phantom assailant while visiting the store. Sisk wrote that on 31 July 2010 she had been in the shop talking to staff member Larry Mayhew:

“While we were talking, I felt a hand grab my right butt cheek and give it a quick pat. I turned and looked over my right shoulder. No one was there. I looked over my left shoulder.

No one was there either.

‘Did you see anybody behind me?’ I asked Larry.

‘No,’ he said.

‘You’re going to think I’m really strange, but I could’ve sworn somebody grabbed my ass just now and patted it.’

“Then Larry told me that another woman who had been in the shop recently also had felt someone grab her butt cheek. ‘Well, you know this place is haunted,’ he said.”¹

Sacramento, California, is another city with a reputedly haunted record shop, as the ‘Sacramento’s Most Haunted’ website explains: “One of the more unexpected haunted places in Sacramento is the old record store in the K Street Mall. It is said that the former store is haunted by the spirit of an older woman, who is dressed in Victorian-style clothing. She mainly seems to hang out down in the basement area. However, she has been known to make her way upstairs in order to reprimand customers who are being too noisy. On several occasions, customers visiting the store reported being told to keep the noise down by the old lady from Victorian times. It is not clear who she is or why she is so keen to keep things quiet inside the building.”

CARRY ON SCREAMING

Another tale of a seemingly haunted CD player is a personal one. Many years ago, when I started working for a local paper, I became friendly with one of the earliest British rock stars, Screaming Lord Sutch – now better known for his schlocky stage antics and founding the Official Monster



FRANK CARSON / CREATIVE COMMONS



“I felt a hand grab my right butt cheek and give it a pat”

Raving Loony Party, but in pre-Beatles days probably one of the most easily recognised figures on the teenage music scene. The closest he came to a hit single was his “Jack the Ripper” release, in appallingly bad taste, but brazenly performed.

He and I shared a favourite local record shop and were together there just two days before he took his own life in 1999. A mutual friend, respected rock musician and author Alan Clayson, wrote a song in tribute to Sutch, entitled “The Last Show On Earth”.

ABOVE: The empty and reputedly haunted record store in the K Street Mall, Sacramento, California, complete with striking murals. **LEFT:** The famous sign outside Nashville’s Ernest Tubb Record Shop.

One day, I decided to play it to him, so I drove to his graveside and opened the car doors to allow the sound of the CD I’d put in the car player to ring around the deserted cemetery.

The track died away... only to immediately start up again. No CD had ever done that before in my player. It kept repeating as I drove home.

Eventually I had to turn it off manually.

ANGELA’S STORY

While doing research for my recently published book, *Vinyl Countdown* (published by Oldcastle), I heard about another apparently genuinely haunted record shop, which seemed to exhibit virtually every ghostly trope in a horror author’s armoury.

A friend had told me he’d come across a record stall at an open-air market selling records I would likely be interested in buying. He passed on details of the woman running the stall and I contacted her – and discovered that she had a unique story to tell.

Angela Collings started selling records over 30 years ago, with a car boot sale, but then diverted into selling antiques, although she “remembered how well records had sold and had a box at the front of the stall. Gradually they took over and I became a record/CD dealer, graduating to owning two shops in Nuneaton called ‘Entertainment Exchange’ with 80,000 records in stock.”

Angela and partner Dawn opened up in 1994, housing their stock in two buildings next door to each other. 60 Queens Road focused on the video games and movies, while 62 was the music and vinyl store, which “was dripping with rarities”.

But it contained some rarities not even the most dedicated collector wanted to discover... as Angela describes in her haunting story:

“No 62, the music store, was mainly my responsibility. We were due to open on a Monday, so the Sunday before I spent upstairs in the shop pricing vinyl and laying out displays. Dawn dropped me off, locking me in, and promising to pick me up later.

“The vinyl was mainly based on the second floor. I had boxes of new stuff I wanted to price. Off I went up the stairs with the company of a radio tuned to the chart show. I became engrossed in pricing. Suddenly, I saw something in the corner of my eye near the old office. I caught the image of a small, dumpy woman dressed in black, with dark hair up in a bun. I turned my head straight to the storeroom door and the image vanished. I had to stay locked in that building for another three hours, in a state of suspended panic. The only thing that kept me sane was the radio. When I heard Dawn knocking, I switched the radio off and ran downstairs.

“I knew I would have to keep this to myself. We employed a lot of young staff, who I was worried could be quite impressionable. I did not want to tell Dawn, because I knew she was more disturbed by anything supernatural than I was.

“I started to notice other weird things. I would put items down and within minutes of turning back to pick them up they would not be in the same place. I noticed a smell in the mornings when I would open up – like old-fashioned pipe tobacco mixed with furniture polish. It would dissipate quickly but appear again the next day. I would occasionally catch a glimpse of the shape of somebody or something – I’d turn my head quickly and there would be nothing there.

“About three months after my first experience on that scary Sunday, I was travelling home in the car with Dawn: ‘Have you ever experienced anything odd in the music shop?’ she suddenly asked me. ‘Creepy, unexplained, ghostly?’ I said: ‘Tell me what you saw first before I say anything.’

“Dawn told me that she had seen, in the very same place that I had, an image of a woman fitting the same description. I was shocked and relieved: this verified what I had seen. I told her of my experience and from that point we swore to share anything that happened with each other, but not with the staff. But, slowly, the staff started to take me into their confidence and tell me about the things they had experienced: many had seen the figure in their peripheral vision. Noises were occurring upstairs and there was no way I could hide it any more. We heard footsteps on the upper floor after the shop was closed and noise coming from the storeroom area.

“Robert (not his real name) came to work for me, staying for nearly 15 years and becoming the overall manager of both stores. It was now widely discussed by staff that there was something strange going on. Robert would have no truck with this. He laughed when anybody mentioned an odd happening, proclaiming himself an atheist and non-believer in anything that did not have a rational explanation. That didn’t last long.

“It started with Robert feeling an invisible presence push past him on one side of his body and then the other. Then he started to see the shape in his peripheral vision. One day, he came down the stairs as white as a sheet. He told me he had seen an apparition

“They are really angry, Angela. They do not actually like you.”

of a man upstairs that seemed to shimmer then disappear.

“The strange events increased, almost at a daily rate. I was working late with three other staff members when we heard the sound of heavy, running footsteps coming from upstairs. It sounded like about five or six people. We all froze. Running out of courage, I sent my staff up the stairs first. There was nobody there.

“Moving and messing about with stock was common. The upstairs floor was full of records and they would regularly be found strewn across the floor. One morning, we opened up and Dawn went upstairs to check everything. Immediately she saw that an old heater had been plugged in and left on all night. Dawn admonished the member of staff who should have ensured that it was unplugged. When we came to lock up that evening, Dawn made sure she was the last person down from upstairs and everything was unplugged. Next morning, when we opened up, the heater was plugged in.

“Another time, Dawn was upstairs and called for Robert and myself to come up: ‘Quickly, the roof has leaked! There’s water on the floor and running down the walls!’

“Robert and I ran upstairs. We could see nothing: no water on the floor – absolutely nothing.

“One evening, Robert was in the storeroom upstairs putting the float in the safe. The door was shut and he was on his own. As he was reckoning the money up he saw under the door, in the light, the shadow of someone approaching, and heard footsteps slowly keeping pace with the shadows. He gathered all his courage and opened the door: of course, there was nobody there.

“Staff would continually come to me with stories – some nearly 20 years after they left.

“I was the first up the stairs one morning onto the record floor and there on the record player was a 1970s photograph of a young girl’s first Holy Communion. She had a bouquet of roses clutched to her that looked almost blood-like. 62 Queens Road was at one time a photographer’s shop. We discovered the female figure that Dawn and I had both seen fitted the description of the lady who had managed the shop for many years. What about the male figure Robert had seen? One morning I mounted the stairs up to the top floor. There in front of me, five years after Robert’s experience, was the figure of a late-middle-aged man. The shimmering image disappeared before my eyes.

“I had a lot of very cool young people working in the shop. Teresa changed her hair on a daily basis – one day a pink Mohican, the next a green skinhead. Her hair captured the attention of something other than the customers and staff. She told me one day that she had been eating her lunch when suddenly a man approached and stared right at her, looking in particular at her hair – then simply vanished. Teresa left.

ANGELA COLLINGS



LEFT: Angela Collings’s Entertainment Exchange shops on Queens Road, Nuneaton. The record shop was at No 62, seen here on the right.

“A customer asked if we knew that the shop was haunted. He told us that he had been upstairs when he had witnessed ‘an apparition’.

“A local newspaper photographer, a guy in his late 50s, asked if I’d ever experienced anything strange in the shop. He told me he had learnt his craft at 62 Queens Road when it was a photography shop and even then it had been haunted. Staff had refused to work after 6pm as they felt something was trying to get them out of the shop.

As downloads became king, our business changed. Mail order and eBay became far more important. Upstairs at No 62 became a mail order floor. One evening, I was upstairs on the computers, listing. This could mean being locked in until 10 at night, making sure all the addresses were printed. Often the metal shutters would be pulled down at the front and back for safety.

“Now as I sat at the computer, the peripheral vision shapes escalated. The activity seemed to increase and the atmosphere seemed as thick as fog. I was looking for a particular address, and felt as if everything around me was shimmering. I had the feeling I could actually slip or disappear into another world or time. Dawn later told me she had experienced the same feeling upstairs.

“One night, I was sitting working and playing an audio book set during the war. A siren sounded, and the atmosphere around me immediately changed. I could hear, though the words were indistinguishable, a very clear whispering in my ear – and the whispers became louder. I was terrified. I picked up my mobile and called Dawn, telling her: ‘Hurry up... just come and get me.’

“No 62 was on a lease. We finally handed the lease and the property back to the landlord. But things didn’t end there.

“We were still based next door and could see who moved into 62. The first tenants did not last long, telling us they found the shop incredibly creepy. The next tenants put a manager in the store, who was often working there until late at night.

“One day I asked him: ‘Have you ever experienced anything strange in the shop?’

“Suddenly, in what I can only describe as like something out of the *Stepford Wives* movie, he turned to me and said: ‘There are six of them. They talk to me. Please don’t tell anyone, please. Do you miss them? You can see them again if you want. You can talk to them again.’ ‘No thank you,’ I answered.

“I was shocked. After half an hour I went to my car. He ran out to me looking very disturbed. ‘Please don’t tell anybody about what I have told you. They are really angry, Angela. They do not actually like you.’

“I had never told him my name.

“You may well think I am totally bonkers. Believe or don’t believe, but this is what happened.”

Having left No 62 behind, Angela is now thankfully ghost-free and concentrates on local markets, trading as Turntable Records.



AND VINYL

ABOVE: One of Jason Leach’s specially created records mixing the ashes of a deceased person with a recording of their voice.

A WHITER SHADE OF PALE

In 2016, the belief that record shops and stores had been jeopardised by the digital revolution inspired artist Chris Cobilis to create ‘Ghost of Record Store’, a sound installation artwork commissioned by the Perth (Australia) Public Art Foundation and intended to commemorate the way in which we once bought and listened to music.

“I wanted to talk about my relationship with the city,” he said. “I used to come up during the weekends or after school and go into record stores and sift through, and that was my education in music. I actually spent 10 years working in record stores in the city. They have almost all closed down. So I thought about making an homage to dead formats and obsolete technologies which aren’t completely dead but as a mainstream artefact don’t exist anymore.”

Cobilis’s installation recreated a record store in a shopfront gallery space in the city. The ghostliness was emphasised by his decision to paint the store entirely white, right down to the records themselves, with some specially cut on transparent vinyl. “I figured the closest way you could make something look like a ghost was to make it white,” he said.

Nothing was actually for sale, but all the compact discs, cassettes and vinyl records did contain music, while players with white headphones encouraged visitors to “come into the space and listen to all these things that I have made and have a different, more meditative experience with recorded pieces of music.”

All the albums were dubbed from music Cobilis owned, with a microphone simply propped up to the stereo in his house so that “the listener actually hears Cobilis listening to the music, pottering about the house,

talking to my cat, doing the washing et cetera; so it sort of becomes a performance, not just the album itself.”²

AND VINYL...

When it comes to the ultimate in ghostly records, perhaps Jason Leach should have the final word.

John Hobson met musician and music producer Jason at a pub in Scarborough in 2007, several years after his mother’s death. They discussed taking the recordings John had of his mother Madge’s voice and somehow combining them and her ashes into a unique vinyl record that would serve as a memento of her life.

Jason turned this seemingly macabre idea into reality; and thus, from death, his company And Vinyly was born. His first male subject was a Frenchman whose wife commissioned the job. Leach’s service has grown steadily since then, as his unique discs containing the ashes and voice recordings of the deceased began to attract attention around the world.³

✦ **GRAHAM SHARPE** is the author of the recently published *Vinyl Countdown* (Oldcastle Books), an autobiographical examination of record collecting and its influence on his life.

NOTES

1 cmt.com

2 “Ghost Of Record Store” opened at 149 Beaufort Street, Northbridge until 4 June, moving to Forrest Chase in a prominent city shopping area, from 8 July to 12 August 2016.

3 Visit <http://www.andvinyly.com/> for more details and to watch Andrea Lewis’s short film, *Hearing Madge*, about Jason’s novel approach to how we can remember the dead. You can contact Jason at: theundertaker@andvinyly.com.

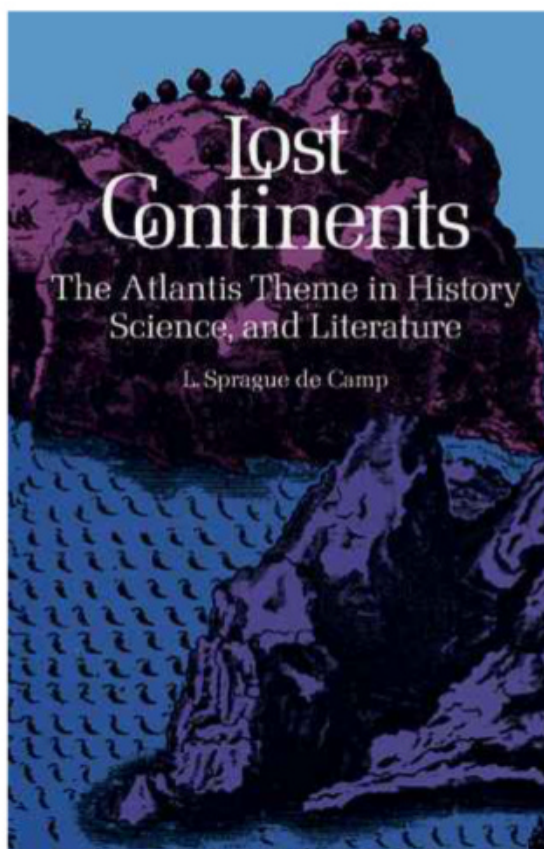
THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

NO 53. CITIES OF THE IMAGINATION

As our illustrious editor has said, everyone loves a unicorn, and we'd guess that as many love a good Atlantis story too. But Tom DeLonge (yes, that one) has come up with a not-quite-fresh take on Atlantis. In an Instagram post he tells the world: "In the early 50s a man was claiming to have regular visits from 'spacemen' that were the same entities that UFO contactees describe meeting, as well as the same ones he said were portrayed in the Bible as 'Angels'. He said they had outposts in our Solar System and had connections to Atlantis and Lemuria... This may be what people describe as the 'Tall Whites' or, 'The Atlanteans' or... 'The Angels' of the Bible. They glow," DeLonge assures us, "they can almost look translucent (potentially) if they are surrounded by an electromagnetic force field, but really, they may be walking around on Earth 'just like men' as the Bible and Vedic texts describe." Er, yes. We'd not be surprised to hear that there were unicorns in Atlantis. Certainly, we've heard there were elephants there – Plato says so – so why not. All we can really be sure of is that the notion of Atlantis is alive and well, and these days seems to be living mostly on cable TV, that rowdy trailer park of deplorable mass misinformation. After that convoluted beginning, we present to you the best book ever on Atlantis, which traces the ever-growing myth from the simple fiction of Plato (c.428-347 BC) to that Edenic place that boasted aircraft and even television.

In a 60-year career, L Sprague de Camp (1907–2000) managed to write or co-write more than 100 books. One wonders if he ever slept, for besides this massive output he clearly found time to read and digest everything about Atlantis that he (or anyone) could lay his hands on in putting together *Lost Continents*, first published in 1954 and updated in 1970. He starts, as one ought, with Plato's account in the *Timaios*, which was his sequel to *The Republic* and intended to be a trilogy. What's usually missed in popular truncations of Plato's description of Atlantis is that it's a recollection of a story allegedly told by Solon (c.638-559 BC), the semi-mythical Greek philosopher and lawmaker, which he heard in Egypt. This endows the tale with the authority of tradition – the "superficial glamor of antiquity" – but also alerts us to the possibility of an elaborate Chinese whisper. One aspect of which is the claim that surviving Atlanteans founded Egyptian civilisation. Surely not missed by those of a literary bent is that Atlantis's unfortunate end may be a metaphor for the imagined fate, or practicality, of Plato's cherished Republic. As the *Timaian* trilogy was never finished, we can't be sure, and perhaps never would have been sure. But we can be certain that



the great conflict between the Athens of some 11,000 years ago and Atlantis didn't occur (a struggle between Athena and Poseidon), since by general agreement Athens started to grow as a settlement only after about 5000 BC. Another little local difficulty is Plato's assertion that west of the Gates of Hercules, the

'remains' of Atlantis have formed mud banks, making navigation all but impossible. Not so, and no evidence to suggest it was ever so. And, of course, it's a platitude that no one *before* Plato mentions Atlantis: on inspection, this vast, advanced, civilised continent seems to shrivel and fade before one's very eyes.

Having given us all we need to know about Plato's story short of becoming classicists ourselves, de Camp delves into its possible genealogy in Greek mythology. He is nothing if not thorough. He comes up with some general ideas, and names, that were 'in the air' from time to time, and we're treated to an excellent tour of Greek mythology in the process. One salient fact is that the Greeks were certainly familiar with the idea of islands rising and falling from the sea. Anyone familiar with Ægean hazes, mists and fogs – not to mention clouds – and the way islands disappear and reappear because of them, will understand how that one got going. But there's nothing one can pin down as a source, exactly, for Plato's story: "... although many of these references... suggest details of Plato's narrative, and might have something to do with it, not one of them says in plain language that an island named Atlantis once supported a civilized state but later sank beneath the Atlantic waves." This didn't stop neo-Platonists taking the story seriously, until with the rise of Christianity and the fading of the Roman Empire it faded into obscurity.

De Camp gets into his stride with the modern pseudo-history of Atlantis. He is a great one for detours into related but not always absolutely pertinent aspects of his subject, which add to the book's richness and variety, and one's general knowledge of the world's weirdness; dry he is not. Besides, as he says: "A body of speculative thought like Atlantism, as it grows, branches out in all directions like a bush... Although the Atlantis-in-America branch has long since ended in a dry twig, the related branch that conceived both the Amerindian and Old-World civilizations as offshoots of Atlantis is still a gaudy green, and perhaps the lustiest branch on the whole unearthly shrub..." As we see from the likes of Tom DeLonge, above. So, dragged into the Atlantean hedge, so to speak, come for instance the poor innocent Mayas, courtesy of a deluded

monk who thought he had deciphered their 'Atlantean' writing, but produced only gibberish. One of the results of this misfortune, some time later, was the 'discovery', *alias* invention, of that other lost continent, Mu. The Maya may take some small consolation, we hope, from the thought that Amerindians in general have been accused of being descendants of anyone but themselves – Egyptians, Assyrians, Phoenicians, Polynesians, the Welsh, and a special favourite, the Ten Lost Tribes of the Jews. But then even the Brits have been anointed with that last one. In a typical merry detour de Camp tells us: "During the last century the noisiest branch of the cult has been that which finds the Lost Ten in the present inhabitant[s] of the British Isles: the Anglo-Israelites or British Israelites. This sect was founded about 1795 by Richard Brothers, an ornament of several lunatic asylums who also proclaimed himself the Nephew of God (a relationship to puzzle the acutest theologian) and the divinely appointed Prince of the Hebrews and Ruler of the World. Brothers even tried to induce the mad King George III to abdicate so that he, Brothers, could take over, and was locked up as a dangerous madman." It's not too hard, although it may be unfair, to infer that de Camp is implying that we're dealing with a bunch of nutters here.

Not exactly nuts but certainly eccentric was Ignatius Donnelly (1831-1901), the modern grandfather of the Atlantis-as-vanished-supercivilisation myth (see **FT332:48-50, 339:48-50**). Apart from a long, busy life as a politician, Donnelly not only promoted Atlantis as the great lost golden place, but also found time to write lengthy books 'proving' that Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was the true author of Shakespeare's works (as if; see **FT280:32-37**), and a catastrophist tract maintaining that the Pleistocene Age was brought on by Earth's collision with a comet (proleptic shades of both Comyns Beaumont and Velikovsky here), plus a novel or two. One wonders what his constituents thought of him. Donnelly propounded 13 'theses' regarding Atlantis, with all of whose detail we shall not tire you. He takes Plato's account literally, and then decorates that with a host of ideas that had been floating around for donkeys' years: that Atlantis developed the first high culture, invented writing and an empire that stretched from South America to the Caspian Sea, and whose various rulers became mythologised into the gods and heroes of the ancient world (including, rather miraculously, those of India), that those who escaped its inundation founded Egyptian civilisation – and so on. In short, everything useful, virtuous, and conducive to happiness comes down to us from

“MY BEST
FRIEND IS A
PERSON WHO
WILL GIVE ME
A BOOK I HAVE
NOT READ.”

Abraham Lincoln

Atlantis. De Camp examines this grab-bag of 13 'theses' in detail and concludes that all Donnelly's new claims have been shown to be wrong (or "careless, tendentious, and generally worthless" in de Camp's own words). This has not stopped Donnelly becoming the *ur*-text for those whose lives are made more rewarding by believing Atlantis actually existed.

On Donnelly's foundation, others inevitably built. More than usually imaginatively. A star among these myth-makers was the usually matchless Helena Blavatsky, but de Camp considers her treatment of lost continents as "somewhat skeletal". Noting that her followers outdid her by adding "a substantial body of detail" but tell "a story quite different from that of Plato", he treats us to a lengthy description of the work of W Scott-Elliot, who obtained his information by "astral clairvoyance" – what we'd now call 'channelling' – which does tend to trigger one's bullshit detector. First we have an account of the evolution of various Blavatskian Root Races, which however bizarre needn't detain us here. Atlantis, it seems, was a part of Lemuria before that continent broke up, and on it developed the Toltecs, who ushered in the great age of Atlantean civilisation. Scholarly opinion is that the Toltecs as we know them flourished between the 10th and 12th centuries, so these are some other Toltecs or Scott-Elliot's chronology is strikingly eccentric. Or both, as these Toltecs did their thing for 100,000 years

before they degenerated, resorting to "sorcery and phallic worship", and were overtaken by the Turanians, from whom the Aztecs descended. At various intervals bits of Atlantis sank into the ocean; their priests learned of these impending disasters by occult means and led their local followers to new lands: thus we find Atlantean descendants

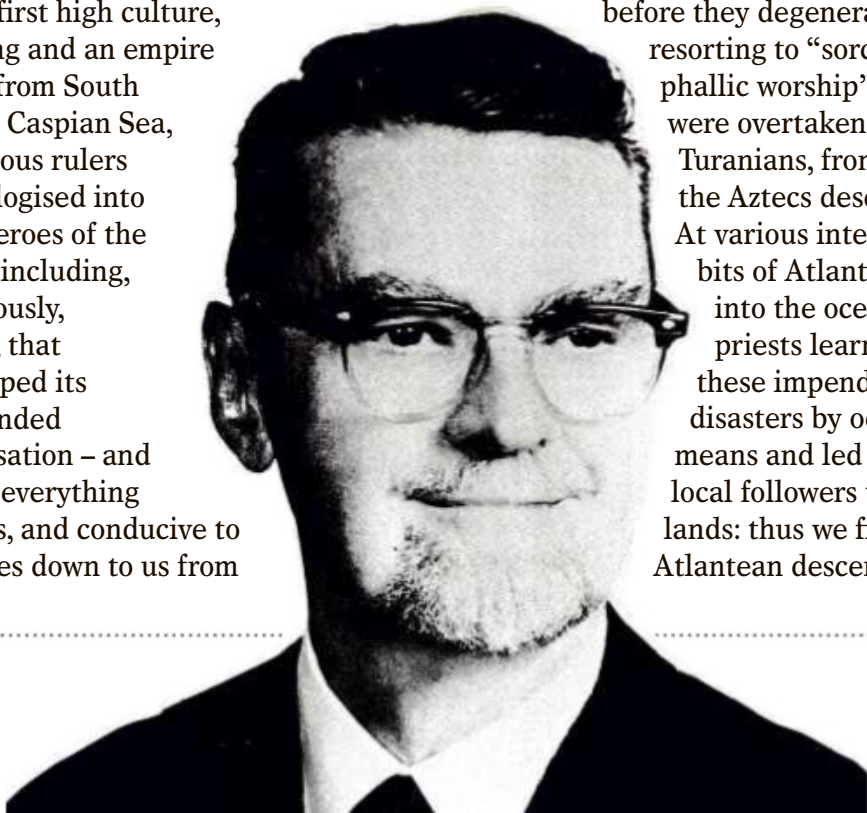
BELOW: L Sprague de Camp.

in such places as Egypt, South America, and Ireland. The Atlantean agronomists' greatest achievement, de Camp tells us deadpan, was the invention of the banana – how many people know that? Slightly less startlingly, they enjoyed the use of airships and alchemists who could produce any required metal to order. "Altogether," says de Camp, "life in the Theosophical Atlantis resembles nothing so much as life on Mars as pictured in the Martian novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs." After a swift (for him) survey of other eye-opening occult claims about Atlantis and Lemuria, de Camp concludes: "So, really, if we want to get to the bottom of the lost-continent problem, we must leave the occultists to their dream-worlds – very pretty, but not for us." On the next page de Camp gives a blunter assessment: "Arguing with [Atlantist occultists] is rather like wrestling with the giant jellyfish *Cyanea*: the substance is too soft and slippery to grasp, and there is not even a brain to stun."

Thereafter, the book becomes severely practical, which doesn't inhibit de Camp's penchant for engagingly informative sidetracks. (For instance, having disposed of various odd theories about Amerindians, he asks "what is the story of the native American cultures?" and proceeds to tell us, just so we know, presumably so we can expound on what's what if we bump into an aggressive Atlantisist in the pub. Likewise, having looked for traces of Atlantis in Homer, he asks, "But who was Homer anyway?" and proceeds to answer the question at length (short answer: no one's certain, and nothing in his account has changed much in 40 years).

Because of this tendency to plough any furrow that looks sufficiently intriguing, it's not too easy to summarise de Camp's following chapters, but he covers places that might have been taken to be Atlantis; yet more reasons why the long-suffering Mayas have nothing to do with the place; sundry eccentric theories about other Amerindians; rising, sinking, and drifting continents and other geological stuff; what, by way of rumour, fact, or legend, may have contributed to Plato's concoction; why it suits the modern mind to believe in *an* Atlantis; and a survey – now, inevitably, a bit dated – of the sunken continent's appearances in fiction. For whatever reason, de Camp makes no mention of the Basques' claim to an Atlantean origin in their national epic poem, which is surprising, given the phenomenal depth and range of his erudition. There is something worth noting or quoting on every other page. And for that, this is an unmissable book.

L Sprague de Camp, *Lost Continents: The Atlantis Theme in History, Science, and Literature*, Gnome Press 1954; revised and updated, Dover 1970.



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The exorcism of Loch Ness

RICHARD FREEMAN recalls an eccentric exorcist's most challenging case

The idea that the Loch Ness Monster was a supernatural entity reached its peak in 1973, when one man decided to exorcise Loch Ness. He was the Reverend Dr Donald Omand, perhaps the 20th century's most renowned exorcist. During his long career he'd dealt not just with ghosts and demonic possession but latter-day vampires and phantom black dogs; these cases, fantastic though they are, were preludes to the doctor's strangest endeavour.

Dr Omand's first encounter with a lake monster was in 1967 while he was on a caravanning holiday on the shores of Long Loch in the Scottish Highlands. One morning, he set out to walk to the village of Ardelve. His route took him past Loch Duich. As he looked out over the loch, the calm water suddenly became violently disturbed. The cause revealed itself to be some immense, aquatic animal, with two huge humps that reared out of the water. Then, as swiftly as it had surfaced, the beast submerged, leaving only ripples behind.

It was not until the following year that Omand began to suspect that these monsters were not flesh-and-blood creatures. In June 1968 he had a far more alarming encounter with a sea serpent. The reverend was holidaying with his friend Captain Jan Andersen in Norway. Andersen had offered to show Dr Omand the "eerie waterway in Norway" – the 'Fjord of Trolls'. The two men travelled along the narrow waterway, screened on either side by gargantuan cliffs. But it was only on their return journey that the exorcist began to sense something was badly wrong. A feeling of growing menace began to creep over the area. As they approached the entrance to the fjord the water



began to seethe.

"What on Earth is it?" asked the reverend.

"It can be only one thing," replied the Captain. "It would be useless to try and avoid it."

Two massive humps appeared, much like the ones the doctor had seen in Scotland, but much closer. The massive animal bore down on their boat with terrifying speed, and the frightened cleric braced himself for an impact that would turn the vessel to matchwood.

"It will not hurt us – they never do," shouted the captain. Sure enough, the monster veered to starboard at the last moment and submerged.

"Shall we follow it?" asked the reverend, eager to see more of the fantastic animal.

The captain's reply was cryptic: "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. The further we kept away from that thing the better. When I said evil, it's what I really meant. This is the third time I have seen it... They are what our ancestors called the Sea Serpents. Today people regard them as existing only in legend. But when you have seen them you believe in them."

Dr Omand questioned his reasoning. "But why are they evil? That one might have easily capsized our boat, but it did us no harm."

"They don't do physical harm," replied the captain. "They want to convince any who see them that they are harmless. The evil they do is to men's characters. The

serpent in the Garden of Eden was no ordinary snake, and what you have just witnessed is no ordinary creature... I am not sure even that it exists physically... there are things which do not exist and yet may be visible to man."

Dr Omand enquired as to their true nature.

"The explanation for these extraordinary appearances, in my submission, lies not in the field of science, but in the realm of the supernatural. What has been seen, and is still visible to some on occasion, is not a concrete present-day monster, but a projection into our day and age of something which had its habitat in Loch Ness and its surroundings, millions of years ago."

These ideas appeared to gain confirmation in 1972, when an eminent Scandinavian neurologist attending a meeting of the Organisation of Enquiry into Psychical Disorder in Sweden delivered a report concerning the monster of Lake Storjsson. The report was about the malevolent effect that the monster seemed to have on those who hunted for it, or saw it regularly. It resulted in shocking moral degeneration. Similar patterns were found, or so the neurologist claimed, in Irish and Scottish cases.

At almost the same time, Dr Omand received a letter from FW Holliday, the renowned monster hunter, who had recently come to similar conclusions. Holliday believed that lake monsters were

dragons in the literal sense: evil paranormal serpents that seemed to generate unnatural levels of terror in witnesses. He detailed his findings in *The Dragon and the Disc* (1973).

With these encouragements, the doctor made up his mind to exorcise Loch Ness. He sought the advice of a fellow exorcist, Reverend Dom Robert Petipierre, a monk of the Anglican Order of St Benedict. Dom Robert took a large map of the Loch and drew a cross upon it. The top of the crucifix was at the Inverness end, the base near Fort Augustus. The intersection terminated on the left at Drumnadrochit and on the right at a point between Inverfarigaig and Dores. The men planned preliminary exorcisms at each of these points. The final rite was to be carried out at the centre of the cross: from a boat in the middle of the loch. All the points of entry and exit along waterways, were "bound against evil" to stop the contamination spreading during the ritual.

On 2 June 1973 the ritual took place. Accompanied by Holliday, Dr Omand exorcised all of the points, and rowed a small boat to the centre of the loch, where he performed the final exorcism: "I adjure thee, thou ancient serpent, by the judge of the quick and the dead, by Him who made thee and the world, that thou cloak thyself no more in manifestation of prehistoric demons, which henceforth shall bring no sorrow to the children of men."

After the ceremony, Dr Omand felt drained and fell into a deep sleep. He believed his exorcism to have been a success and subsequently went on to exorcise Lake Storjsson in Sweden. Despite his optimism Dr Omand seems to have failed, for monsters are still seen in both lakes to this day.

✦ **RICHARD FREEMAN** is a cryptozoologist, author, zoological journalist, and zoological director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology.

Cockroach farming in China

CHRIS SAUNDERS reports from China, where humanity's saviour might be the humble roach...

If you were to make a list of the most vile, repulsive and disgusting creatures ever to crawl over the face of the Earth, it's highly likely that, alongside some very well known politicians, cockroaches would feature near the top. But are they really that bad? The evidence suggests otherwise. In fact, they could even save the human race.

It is a little known fact that China leads the way in cockroach farming, which is already a legitimate growing industry in the Middle Kingdom. Thanks to the success of hundreds of state-of-the-art facilities all over the country processing billions of the little critters each year, it is now set to go global and could become a major player in several disparate fields sooner rather than later.

One thing is certain: there is no shortage of them. There are around 4,600 different species recognised by science (don't worry, only 30 of these share the same spaces as humans). They also don't appear to be going anywhere soon. Notoriously resilient, roaches are known to withstand environmental conditions that would be lethal to most life forms. The oldest roach fossils are thought to be around 350 million years old, meaning they co-existed with the dinosaurs and can survive on anything from decaying matter to faeces. They can go for up to a month without ingesting any food at all, and the rumour that they can survive for weeks without their heads is actually true, mainly due to them having an open circulatory system which ensures that after decapitation clotting would likely seal the wound and prevent blood



ABOVE: Cockroach farmer Li Bingcai tending to his roach farm in Yibin, in China's southwestern Sichuan province.

loss. Furthermore, they breathe through tiny holes in each segment, called spiracles, which pipe air directly to tissue, and they have ganglia (nerve tissue agglomerations) distributed throughout their bodies that perform basic nerve functions, meaning they don't even require a brain to control movement. Impressive.

On average, a female roach will lay 10-90 eggs at once, up to four times a year. The eggs will hatch within days, and the cockroach will become fully grown and start reproducing within a month – which makes them perfect for breeding. The most obvious and pressing reason for creating and cultivating cockroach farms would be to provide a sustainable food source. The current population explosion is putting a huge burden on existing resources and pretty soon there might not be enough food to go around. Of course, entomophagy (consumption of insects by humans) is nothing new. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization around two billion people in the world, primarily in parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America, already incorporate insects into

their diet. If we could just control our gag reflex, the practice would undoubtedly spread to the West in the near future as global food resources dwindle. One thing that could help make them more palatable is crushing the insects and re-forming them into bars. In places like Sichuan Province, southwest China, people are not as squeamish and simply deep-fry handfuls with some cumin or chilli powder. They taste better if you fry them twice, apparently. Li Bingcai, a cockroach farmer in Yibin city who now supplies local restaurants, got into the business two years ago. "I plan to produce food products like cockroach meatballs and cockroach flour in two years," he said. "I've always wanted to make food products from the beginning. People were scared of them at first, but now so many are eating them. The taste is special and they are full of protein."¹

Sichuan is also the location of what is believed to be the largest cockroach-breeding base in the world, and the first to pass the stringent testing required to obtain a GAP certification from the State Food and Drug Administration. Geng Funeng, chairman of Gooddoctor Pharmaceutical

Group who owns the facility, once likened it to a "five-star hotel" for cockroaches.

The plant, in Xichang city, is currently 'home' to as many as six billion American cockroaches (*Periplaneta americana*), one of the largest common varieties, which are primarily cultivated for medicinal use. Chinese Traditional Medicine (TCM) has long held that ointments and creams derived from pulverised cockroaches can be used to treat various complaints. "[Cockroaches] really are a miracle drug," said Liu Yusheng, a professor at Shandong Agricultural University and head of Shandong Province's Insect Association. "They can cure a number of ailments and they work much faster than other medicine. China has the problem of an ageing population, so we are trying to find new medicines for older people, and these are generally cheaper than Western medicine."²

Eager to protect their methods and techniques, the farms themselves are notoriously secretive. However, in the summer of 2018 a Chinese journalist was allowed entry to the Xichang plant and reported a total of 23 different compartments, or 'bedrooms', including hatching rooms, lava rooms, and adult rooms.³ Closely monitored and reared under strictly controlled conditions, the insects are kept in near total darkness and the entire facility managed with the help of a 'smart manufacturing' system which collects and analyses over 80 categories of data, including humidity, temperature, food supply and consumption, as well as changes like genetic mutations, with the ultimate aim of ensuring an optimal breeding environment. The system also "learns" from its historical data so it can make improvements.

The Xichang facility has been credited with solving the local unemployment problem, and



now boasts an annual output exceeding one billion yuan. Every day, it produces around 600,000 bottles of Kangfu Xinye, a potion consumed by an estimated 40 million people. It can either be taken orally or applied externally and is said to combat everything from oral and peptic ulcers to stomach cancer. The potion is often marketed as ‘snake oil,’ has a slightly fishy smell, and is made by crushing and processing cockroaches when they reach a desired size and weight. “The effectiveness of cockroaches has been tested by the bodies of our ancestors and proven by lab experiments,” Geng said, by way of explanation. As the drug made its way into thousands of Chinese hospitals over the years, the breeding factory expanded to 12,000 square metres (129,000 sq ft) from a modest 20 square metres two decades ago and the company is set to open a second breeding centre “three to five times the size of the current one”. Gooddoctor, which employs hundreds of staff in its research and development department and receives millions of yuan in government funding every year for its research programmes, is also investigating using roaches in cosmetic facial masks, diet pills and hair loss treatments.

While TCM has been singing the praises of cockroaches for hundreds if not thousands of years, it seems that Western science has finally got the bug. The fact that insects are a good source of protein is old hat, but more recent studies have found that our friend the American cockroach also contains other much sought-after elements like amino acids, ascorbic acid, trehalase and glycoprotein. And it isn’t just this species that has potential health benefits. Back in 2016, the Internet was suddenly awash with stories about so-called ‘cockroach milk’, with many dubbing it the next superfood. The media buzz started when an international team of researchers conducted an in-depth nutritional study of the substance the female Pacific beetle cockroach (*Diploptera punctata*) produces to feed its offspring and published their findings in



ABOVE: A dish of cockroaches at a restaurant in Yibin; could this be the food of the future?

the *Journal of the International Union of Crystallography*.⁴ Not technically ‘milk’, the substance is a yellowish fluid that solidifies into crystals in the offspring’s stomachs. The studies revealed it contains up to three times more protein and calories than buffalo milk, making it one of the most nutrient-rich substances on the planet. It remains to be seen whether this latest fad is fit for human consumption, but the scientific findings certainly provide food for thought.

Yet another reason cockroaches are being farmed in such huge quantities is to deal with kitchen waste. Insufficient or improper processing of such waste in China has created scope for criminal activities, including the recycling of cooking oil from restaurant waste, a food safety scandal that has blighted the country for years. Reports state that processing plants run by Shandong Qiaobin Agricultural Science and Technology in Jinan, Shandong Province, where the number of cockroach farmers has tripled to around 400 in the past three years, use upwards of one billion cockroaches to process about 60 tons of kitchen waste per day. When the waste arrives at the plants it is simply mashed up and fed to the roaches. According to the company chairman, Li Yanhong, they are capable of consuming five per cent of their

own bodyweight per day and the heat they generate while doing so is enough to cultivate vegetables. When the roaches die off, their bodies are milled and baked into high-protein livestock feed, making virtually the entire operation sustainable and eco-friendly. This aspect is particularly timely given that in the aftermath of several outbreaks of African swine fever in 2018 it was made illegal to use human food waste as pig feed in China.⁵ Obviously a man with big ideas, Li claims that “based on our current rate of expansion, it will take only three to four years for us to process all the kitchen waste in China.”

However, there’s a potential dark side to all this. In an industry based on consumerism, more is usually better, and it has been suggested that behind the scenes farmers are attempting to genetically modify cockroaches to make them consume more, breed faster, or grow bigger. The notion that a secret base somewhere is doing its utmost to produce giant cockroaches is straight out of a horror story. Plus, it wouldn’t be beyond the realms of possibility for the military to get involved and attempt to weaponise the little critters in some way, perhaps by making them carriers of infectious diseases.

Also worth considering is the very real possibility of these

cockroach armies mounting mass escapes, with or without human intervention, and laying waste to the surrounding areas. In August 2013 it was reported that an unknown perpetrator destroyed a nursery used to breed cockroaches for medicinal purposes in Dafeng City, Jiangsu Province, resulting in a million of the insects swarming the area and prompting authorities from the Board of Health to perform “large-scale disinfection”.⁶ As the industry grows exponentially, this kind of occurrence could become far more common in the future: which is truly the stuff of nightmares.

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◆ CM SAUNDERS is a journalist and editor from South Wales who has lived off and on in China for over 12 years.

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A carnival of astonishment

John Rimmer explores a major re-evaluation of the data in Charles Fort's *Book of the Damned*, and finds it a model of how historical fortean investigation should be done

Redemption of the Damned: vol 1 Aerial Phenomena

A Centennial Re-Evaluation of Charles Fort's *Book of The Damned*

Martin Shough with Wim Van Utrecht

Anomalist Books, 2019

Pb, 410pp, £27.95, illus, ISBN 9781949501070

Why has it taken 100 years for the data in Charles Fort's *Book of the Damned* to be re-evaluated? Fort makes it clear on the opening pages of the book that he does not want them re-evaluated. What he is dealing with is not data, subject to evaluation, but a theatrical display, a carnival of entertainment and astonishment, to draw forth gasps of wonder or fear at the parade of "corpses, skeletons, mummies, twitching, tottering ... Here and there will flit little harlots ... There are pale stenchies and gaunt superstitions and mere shadows and lively malices; whims and amiabilities."

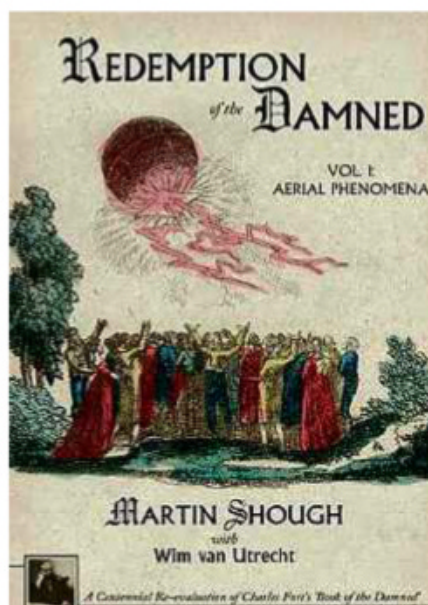
And to make it absolutely clear, "The power that has said to all these things that they are damned, is Dogmatic Science." "Dogmatic Science", he tells us, "excludes" things if it cannot fit anomalous data into one of its pigeon holes.

Fortunately, here are a couple of fortean iconoclasts who have set out to violate the First Law of forteanism. They have decided to test whether or not the "little harlots" and "pale stenchies" are quite as damned as Fort claimed. The cases reviewed are taken in chronological order, starting with the French astronomer Charles Messier's observation of a large number of "small globules" crossing the

disc of the Sun in 1777.

Messier was meticulous in recording his observation, and the authors have been meticulous in analysing his report. He concluded that what he had seen were "more probably small meteorites", but in 1777 that term could mean virtually any atmospheric phenomenon, and certainly did not mean the stony, extraterrestrial objects we mean today.

The Messier account is particularly interesting because in retelling this and many other similar incidents, Fort "whimsically supposes them to be 'super voyagers' in space" and that this has provided a grounding to much post-1947 speculation on UFOs. The report became a staple of ufological history, and reached its height with the publication in 1954 of *Flying Saucers from Mars*, allegedly by "Cedric Allingham" but probably by the famous TV astrono-



mer Patrick Moore. He spins the story, saying that Messier reported "they were large and swift, and they were like ships and yet like bells". "Allingham" claims to have read this in "one of Messier's diaries".

"They admit there are still one or two cases which left them scratching their heads"

Shough and Van Utrecht comment "Today this mutated canard – unattributed – is all over the Internet. The fable has grown on its own, but arguably Charles Fort is to blame."

The problem with almost any re-examination of fortean accounts from this era, and probably any account of strange phenomena of any era is that we were not there, and do not have direct access to the witnesses; everything we know about such incidents is usually mediated through two, three or even more intermediate sources. The great value of this book is that it strips away most, even if not all, of the intermediaries.

One of the best examples is the case of mysterious lights seen in 1893 in the straits between Japan and Korea, north of the city of Nagasaki. The authors take 28 pages exploring every detail of the accounts of this phenomenon. On this occasion they are able to be pretty certain that they have unearthed the correct explanation, asking: "What is the probability ... that images resembling fires on boats were not fires on boats in a part of the world where fleets of boats with smoky fires on them did operate in the late 19th century?"

Obviously, there are several cases where there is insufficient evidence for such certainty, but the explanations suggested are very plausible, and just "smell

right", although the authors are honest enough to admit that there are still one or two cases which left them scratching their heads and that there may be in a very few cases hints of fringe meteorological phenomena.

Each case is a model of how historical fortean investigation should be done. The authors take us to the source quoted by Fort, with reproductions of the documents quoted, and then go beyond that to other related material, scientific papers, newspapers and other contemporary sources. They have used modern online tools such as Google maps and Streetview to guide us to the places themselves.

But one important question is answered. The authors conclude that the reports they have studied in such detail do not support Fort's claim that this data has been "excluded" by a scientific establishment, or that anything in them suggests any "intrusions into our reality from an Otherworld of limitless reality".

Which leads to the question, what is Fort really doing in this book? In a recent *Fortean Times* (FT388:46-51) the philosopher Ian Kidd attempted to show that far from being an enemy of science – an impression which comes across strongly to me when reading his books – Fort was a philosopher positing a new scientific paradigm; but to me Fort, when not simply describing the anomalous reports, seems to be a pioneer post-modernist putting the English language through an endurance course.

But he does have one massive achievement to his name, which allows us to forgive anything else.

He invented forteanism.

★★★★★

The art of Emsh

From SF illustrator to avant-garde film maker, he creatively dissolved art categories

Dream Dance

The Art of Ed Emshwiller

Ed. Jesse Pires

Lightbox Film Center, 2020

Hb, 176pp, \$30, plates, ISBN 9781944860295

Anyone with science fiction paperbacks or magazines from the 1950s and 1960s will have covers by Ed Emshwiller. His art epitomised the later Golden Age of SF, with rugged space pilots rescuing gorgeous women from fearsome aliens.

His covers graced issues of *Galaxy*, *Astounding Science Fiction*, *F&SF*, *If*, *Future* and other magazines, as well as those wonderful Ace Doubles,



in the days when SF novels didn't have to be 600 pages long. Emshwiller was hugely prolific: John Brunner, Theodore Sturgeon, Philip K Dick, Samuel R Delany, Fritz Leiber and countless other authors sold behind his artwork.



His wife, SF writer Carol Emshwiller, his daughters, even the young lad who lived next

door (Bill Griffith, later the creator of the *Zippy the Pinhead* comic strip), were his models. Griffith and daughter Susan Emshwiller, a screenwriter, contribute essays to this fascinating book, the catalogue of the first major exhibition of Emshwiller's work, held in Philadelphia at the end of last year.

In the early Sixties Emshwiller moved into experimental films, and later into video. Stanley Kubrick saw his film *Relativity* and asked him to work on the Star Gate sequence in *2001: A Space Odyssey*; "I don't know the reason, but Dad declined," writes daughter Susan.

He blended space and time, combining his art with filming dance in "a pas de deux of body and brushstroke", as one of the writers says, "dissolving artmaking categories".

The exhibition, and this splendid book, cover Emshwiller's later life – he became head of the film and video school at California Institute of the Arts in 1979, and founded the CalArts Computer Animation Lab in 1983 – not just his years of SF illustration for which most of us know his name.

Jay Vickers

★★★★★



Supernatural Cities

Enchantment, Anxiety and Spectrality

ed. Karl Bell

Boydell Press, 2019

Hb, 314pp, £65, ISBN 9781783274413

"Cities," the editor tells us in this book's first sentence, "are one of our most potent symbols of modernity." Supernatural beliefs and practices, though, are often seen as "traditional, unmodern, even anti-modern". This, it is rightly said, is a "simplistic dichotomy". This scholarly collection is devoted to the rubbishing of that dichotomy.

It is meticulously done. The book's intellectual, chronological and geographical sweep is wide. The homicidal goatman of Washington DC rubs his hairy shoulders with the ghostly girl of the Elephant and Castle tube station, amorphous horrors in the Urals, unicorn-headed beasts in Tokyo, aboriginal spectres in the goldfields of Victoria, and a north Manchester boggart. We learn how 18th-century Parisian urbanites denounced witchcraft while being secretly obsessed with it, and about the epidemic of the ghosts of suicides in contemporary Beijing.

There are some illuminating exegeses (notably Felicity Wood's exposition of the conflation of the notion of the Mamlambo – a wealth-giving spirit prominent in South African culture – with more conventional sugar daddies), and some colourful vignettes. But I couldn't help asking: is the book really necessary? The dichotomy at which it is aimed is obviously and ludicrously wrong: do we really need to have its wrongness exposed at such length and with so many footnotes?

When we see evidence in the archaeological record of a belief in the afterlife, or a belief in supernatural entities, we know we're dealing with behaviourally modern humans. As a species we have a defining and incurable belief in the supernatural – a belief that the Enlightenment may have rearticulated and rechannelled, but which it has done nothing to suppress. Why suppose that if one puts lots of supernatural believers together

in a big settlement, their beliefs might change? Of course they don't. It is equally strange to see cities as particularly modern: they've been around for the last 5,000 years or so.

In an attempt to justify its existence, the book contends that supernatural entities and ideas have helped city dwellers to express and deal with anxieties "ranging from exterior concerns about socio-economic pressures and cultural or political tensions to interior concerns linked to a sense of spatial unease, environmental and historical guilt, communal breakdown and reconstruction, and perceived boundaries between the self and the other", as well as positively fostering community, identity, a sense of place, and so on. Fair enough. But there is nothing quintessentially urban about the anxieties: they are the unhappy inheritance of us all. Nor (as the editor acknowledges), is there anything new about them –

although the language in which they are discussed may have some new syntax.

It is therefore hard to make the case that there is really something new to be said, and to be worth saying. The authors have a brave go, but since self-justification is difficult, they too often take refuge

in the learned obfuscation of social scientists, hoping that extensive allusion and cross-referencing will be taken for substance. The book will have an honourable place on the shelves of university libraries, but there is likely to be too much Foucault and not enough Fear for readers of *Fortean Times*.

Charles Foster

★★★★★

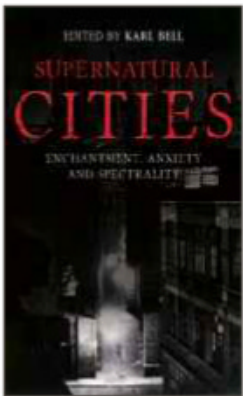
Conspiracy Theories

Quassim Cassam

Polity Books, 2019

Pb, 127pp, £9.99, bib, ISBN 9781509535835

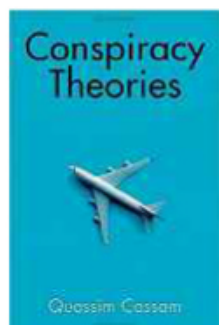
In some respects, this is a sensible and rational little book (as befits the work of one of the country's leading philosophers). Cassam doesn't trash conspiracy theory or conspiracy theorists (at least, not immediately) and is critical of the psychology of conspiracy theory for creating a





spurious pathology out of traits we all share. And yet ...

Cassam's leading proposition is that conspiracy theories are political, and actually constitute propaganda. To arrive at this proposition, he has to do some paring; first off, he distinguishes Conspiracy Theories from



conspiracy theories (a jaundiced observer might consider this a Lacanian sleight of hand, but I think he is sincere in

his motives). The point of this distinction is to separate those conspiracy theories that have proven true (Watergate, WMD in Iraq) and those not overtly political (the Moon landing hoax, flat Earth) from those he wishes to discuss.

This subset turns out to consist of politically orientated conspiracy theories (the JFK assassination and 9/11 are the examples he foregrounds, with passing reference to the Birther theory and, later in the book, Holocaust denial) that Cassam considers implausible or unprovable (this is central to his definition of Conspiracy Theory, capitalised). And there's the rub: the resulting, pared-down, proposition – that political conspiracy theories are political – is, obvious tautology aside, fatally weak. And there's more.

The two conspiracy theories (that is, Conspiracy Theories) highlighted throughout the book appeal to a broad range of people across the political spectrum; they are as likely to be found among left-leaning conspiracists as alt-right groups, and actually at more or less all points in between (Cassam cheerfully acknowledges this). But if Conspiracy Theories are propaganda, designed to promote a particular ideology, then JFK and 9/11 are either anomalies or they undermine the proposition; since they appeal across the political spectrum, they can hardly be said to represent any particular ideology.

What is the purpose of this (largely unsuccessful) winnowing exercise? It is to bolster the true contention of the book: that conspiracy

theory (or Conspiracy Theory; at this point the distinction seems rather less relevant) is a threat to democracy. This argument is not novel, and it suffers from the same weaknesses as other similar claims (there is insufficient space in a review to do this point justice). Finally, Cassam presents some strategies for arguing against conspiracy theory, and with conspiracy theorists; these are strangely defeatist, starting as they do with an admission that they will not work against hard-core conspiracists. There is something open and honourable about Cassam's approach to this topic; but ultimately it doesn't survive its own definitions.

Noel Rooney

★★★★★

Shakespeare and the Folktale

An Anthology of Stories

ed. Charlotte Artese

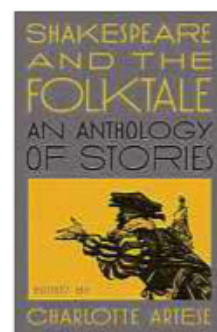
Princeton University Press 2019

Pb, 392pp, £16.99, bib, ind, ISBN 9780691190860

Oral tales endured for centuries before being collected and published only recently, relative to their origins. A 2016 study showed how folktales can be very ancient indeed. A few, such as Jack and the Beanstalk, trace back to the Bronze Age, while many are rooted in the Western branch of Indo-European languages. Folklore studies (folkloristics) follow a method of classification based on types of basic plot and motifs, "the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition", which "must have something unusual or striking about it". The resulting tale-type index contains thousands of motifs.

It is from this methodology that this book springs, with the connection between some of the folktales and the plays of Shakespeare being based on a few shared motifs, or even only one. The Chilean folktale White Onion, in which a girl promises her hand and a ship of gold to whoever could go to bed with her and turn over toward her in the bed, whilst not doing so would forfeit a treasure ship, is included for having the "pound of flesh" motif famously found in the Venetian play staged memorably in London with Dustin Hoffman in the title

role. This is not to suggest that Shakespeare knew Chileans. This and some others are chosen to represent a diversity of cultures; others for the closeness of the connections between the folktales and the play in question, as well as "how well they were told". What results is



an anthology of 43 folktales illustrating a varying and arguable degree of influences on *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Comedy*

of Errors, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *King Lear*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*. The mystery of Shakespeare is simultaneously illuminated and extended.

How much could one man have possibly known? Was his genius such that he could draw on a well of collective unconsciousness from which many folktales emerge, a wild talent like none other before or since?

Even without the Shakespeare interest, this is a treat for lovers of folktales. But if you want to enter the maze of Shakespeare's possible literary influences and really enter the reading world of the writer(s), this will take you much deeper than Wikipedia's scant treatment of the plays' sources.

Jerry Glover

★★★★★

Hellebore

#1 The Sacrifice Issue

ed. María J Pérez Cuervo

<https://helleborezine.bigcartel.com> 2019

Pb, 68pp, £6.75, illus

Hellebore is a beautifully produced A5 magazine celebrating and analysing British folk horror. It's named after a poisonous plant that has the power of altering perception, and thought to be one of the main ingredients for witches' flying ointment. The magazine aims to explore themes in folklore, myth, history, archaeology, psychogeography, witches and the occult "with scholarly rigour for a popular audience".

Issue one focuses on sacrifice, a popular theme in folk horror. The lead article covers supposed

Druid sacrifice in stone circles, based on the ideas of John Aubrey, William Stukely and others, and reinforced



by popular culture from the 1978 *Doctor Who* episode "The Stones of Blood" to the recent TV series *Britannia*.

There are

pieces on traditional witches, on bog people, on JG Frazer and Margaret Murray's belief in the slain king, and an interview on Folk Horror with Prof Ronald Hutton. Excellent!

Chris Hayhurst

★★★★★

The Unknown Pursuit

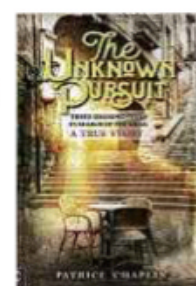
Three Grandmothers in Search of the Grail: A True Story

Patrice Chaplin

Clairview Books 2019

Pb, 188pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781912992065

This is the latest of Patrice Chaplin's books about Girona, the "City of Secrets" (FT226:46-52) – but not the best. A disparate bunch of people arrive in the Catalan city of Girona for an esoteric retreat; the leader doesn't turn up, so one of the older women, clearly based on the author, reluctantly takes



over, running art classes and meditation sessions. Most of the people in the group are self-centred, living off past

glories and hiding behind masks; many of them are bitchy and simply unpleasant. Three of them end up looking for the Grail.

I've written before that Chaplin's novels are all partly autobiographical, and her autobiographical books are all partly fictionalised. This one, "a true story that happened as written", is written in a very novelistic style. But as either fact or fiction, there's not enough substance in it, not enough story or mystery or denouement; we learn nothing new about Girona and its secrets – or about the Grail.

David V Barrett

★★★★★

Vampires in context

How did the concept of Dracula and other vampires fit into the Victorian world of folklore, literature, medicine and psychiatry?

Dracula for Doctors

Medical Facts and Gothic Fantasies

Fiona Subotsky

Cambridge University Press, 2019

Pb, 186pp, £24.99, refs, ind, ISBN 9781911623298

There can be few people as qualified as Dr Subotsky to write this book: an eminent psychiatrist with a long-standing interest in history and literature, she was also the spouse of noted genre film producer Milton Subotsky.

Subotsky's mission is clear: to find Dracula and vampire-related "medical sources and medicine in fiction, especially if written by doctors". She puts both Bram Stoker and his sanguinary creation in a social and historical context.

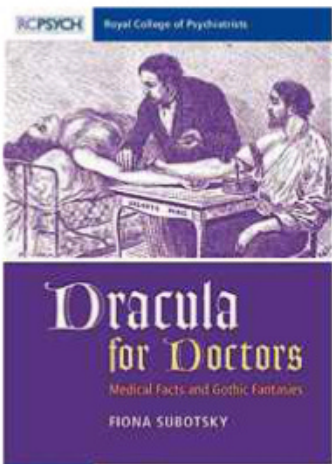
Dracula was famously the pinnacle of a Gothic century which had seen Horace Walpole's notion of "gloomth" popularised. The novel's authenticity owes a great deal to Stoker's interest in folklore: he knew Sir Richard Burton, author of *Vikram and the Vampire* (1870), and was known to have read S Baring Gould's *Werewolves* (1865). And though Stoker's own career was spent in the theatre, he knew – and was related to – many medical men. His surgeon brother Thornley Stoker wrote an account of a cranial hæmorrhage which greatly resembles Renfield's collapse with a depressive skull injury and subsequent trepanation by Van Helsing.

The medical professionals of Victorian England were beset by many challenges and armed with few interventions. There were epidemics of cholera and rabies; tuberculosis was endemic among the poor. Just like the authentic vampires of folklore, Stoker's sinister count was written as a

contagion personified. Subotsky mentions ships, overcrowded with Irish emigrants, arriving in Canada in the late 1840s full of corpses and the afflicted, just as the *Demeter* did in Whitby.

Mental illness features too. Subotsky points out that ideas about "Cruelty, Bloodthirstiness and Moral Insanity" are explored, using Renfield, for one.

Syphilis, a yet-incurable malady from which Stoker himself may have suffered, ended in delirium and madness. Insane asylums feature in the novel, and were the ultimate destination of many with tertiary syphilis.



Darwin's ideas had percolated by the end of the century to the extent that heredity in human stock preoccupied the educated classes. If we could "progress", could we also "degenerate" and become beast-like? Were asylums, like the one in

Dracula, populated with relapsed humanity? Was immigration of alien peoples (like that of Dracula himself) likewise weakening the English gene-pool?

Psychiatry was a nascent discipline, still encumbered with physiognomy, Mesmerism and Charcot's notion of hysteria (deriving from the womb). The "dual existence" concept opened up by hypnosis and sleep-walking evoked the idea of a double consciousness or multiple personality. Was a human being even an authentic instance of him/herself? Subotsky points out that Lucy Westenra's personality change fits the modern diagnosis of dissociative identity disorder.

Considering the psyche of Dracula himself, we are reminded that Mina and Van Helsing think that Count Dracula has a criminal "child-mind", just as Jack the Ripper (another contemporary anxiety) had been posited to have. German

psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing, author of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, had defined "lust-murder" and had used the Ripper as an example. This concurrence of domination, sex and death in *Dracula* prefigures the appearance of the "vamp" – an exploitative, seductive woman.

Victorians were also concerned with defining death, and the potential for premature burial: "The notion of catalepsy as a state that could be mistaken for death seized the Victorian literary imagination." Opium references appear in other fiction of the time (in Dickens and Conan Doyle, for just two). Could the opium fugue have indicated to Victorians that life and death were not so easily differentiated?

Subotsky deals with the tension between materialism and mysticism, pointing out that the younger Seward always looks for materialistic explanations and the older Van Helsing cautions him against it. In an age of such rapid technological and scientific progress, Victorians still gravitated in numbers to worldviews like Theosophy and Spiritualism. British psychiatrist Forbes Winslow claimed that the Spiritualist craze was filling the lunatic asylums of the USA.

Dracula for Doctors is a little dry. It doesn't race along like a detective novel, but then perhaps it isn't supposed to. It's engaging enough, but suffers (only a little) from an identity crisis. There are elements of lit-crit. The medical conjectures transition from considering the novel in the terms understood in its own day to conjecture about real conditions as they are understood now. Did Dracula have Marfan syndrome, for example?

Whether your interest is that of the folkloric or the literary variety of fan (they are very different), this is a well-informed and well-researched read.

Deborah Hyde

★★★★★

Haunted Cars and Highways

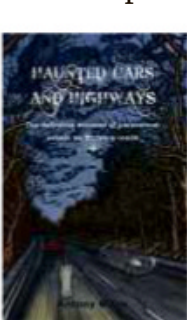
The Definitive Account of Paranormal Events on Britain's Roads

Antony Milne

Empiricus Books, 2019

Pb, 432pp, £13.95, bib, ind, ISBN 9781857568943

This a hefty and thorough piece of work; no one is going to criticise the author for overlooking the odd tale – the ambition of the subtitle would outpace anyone – because the book contains so many odd tales, including the one about the rogue west London bus. This phantom No 7, first reported in the 1930s



and last seen in 1990 around 1am, haunts the area around Cambridge Gardens in Ladbroke Grove, forcing cars off the road.

Milne catalogues and comprehensively cross-references hundreds of similar reports from the revenant roadways, and links events together well. I liked the delving into the past for older forms of transport but think he could have gone further in drawing parallels with modern stories and how tales repeat while the vehicles alter. The vanishing hitchhiker trope of the 20th century, for example, has antecedents in the stagecoach era which feature in this collection, but more fun could have been had bringing these together.

Such commentary is what is most missing in the book, even if sometimes it might be speculative. Milne clearly knows his subject well and an injection of more of his ideas linking fortan phenomena would have been welcome, breaking up what occasionally veers into lists of stuff.

In the epilogue he does offer some thoughts about the stories; but this book is more like a handy reference resource, a better-referenced Paranormal Database if you will, and useful for researchers in that context.

It is hard to imagine reading the stories in order for pleasure, but those who prefer to get their information from books rather than online may find it a welcome addition to their shelves, especially in view of some lesser known stories covered.

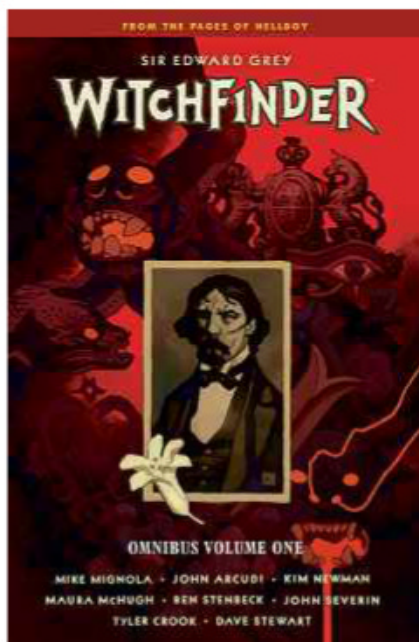
Chris Roberts

★★★★★



COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

STEVE TOASE PRESENTS HIS LATEST PICKS FROM THE WORLD OF SEQUENTIAL ART



Witchfinder Omnibus Vol 1

Mike Mignola, Maura McHugh, Kim Newman, Ben Stenbeck, Dave Stewart et al
Dark Horse, 2019

Hb, 440pp, £22.99, ISBN 978-1506714424

Sir Edward Grey, Witchfinder, is a fortean character if ever there was one. Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* universe is soaked in dark mysteries and is the perfect home for this Victorian agent of the Crown who encounters horrors and mysteries in London streets, the weird Wild West, and the Somerset Levels. This is a world of ghostly creatures, secret societies, and conspiracies, which will appeal to FT readers.

This omnibus collects the first three volumes, with short opening story "Murderous Intent" setting the tone. Ben Stenbeck's artwork and Dave Stewart's colours perfectly capture that iconic, shadow-inflected, *Hellboy* style. The stories feature cryptozoology, mediumship, and cults, while there are nods to Poe and Shakespeare, among others. Sir Edward is an interesting lead character, falling back on his religious faith in the first instance, which rarely works out. He is often out of his depth, and in contrast to many Victorian heroes can't just rely on his Britishness to triumph. My favourite story is "The Mysteries of Umland", a folk horror tale exploring the interface between modernity and the older landscape, in this case the waterlogged Somerset Levels. There is menace in the writing by Kim Newman and Maura McHugh, with Tyler Crook on art duties, on colours, perfectly capturing

how the emerging science of the 19th century existed alongside the embedded folk beliefs of established communities. Dave Stewart's magnificent colour work ties all the stories together, and the chapter break art is perfect and menacing. An excellent addition to any fortean's library.

The Thirteenth Floor: Home Sweet Home

Guy Adams, various artists

Rebellion, 2019

Pb, 48pp, £4.99, ISBN 9781781087442



The Thirteenth Floor is a classic strip from the early-1980s anthology comic *Scream*. The story blends

fears about technology (pre-dating worries about the Internet of Things) with the stuff of classic horror comics. This new story carries on from those featured in the *Scream* and *Misty* specials Rebellion released in 2017 and 2018, focusing on the repair of Max, Maxwell Tower's omniscient computer, troubled teen Sam, and Police Officer Hester Benedict.

The whole premise of *The Thirteenth Floor* is that bullies and miscreants are punished, and "Home Sweet Home" deals with the question of where to draw the line, especially when the decisions are being made by someone whose morality is skewed by their own experiences.

While the main story is written by Guy Adams, and lettered throughout by Simon Bowland, nine artists have illustrated *Home Sweet Home*, including Abigail Harding, Frazer Irving, and Kelley Jones (with colouring where needed by FT cover artist Quinton Winter). For me, the most interesting artwork is by British comics legend Tom Paterson, who drew for many children's comics such as *Buster* back in the day. To see such a visceral story illustrated in the classic British grotesque style makes this worth picking up. *The Thirteenth Floor* has always dealt with difficult subjects surrounding morality and the treatment of people, particularly the more

vulnerable in society, and *Home Sweet Home* continues this tradition. The volume also includes a short called "The Romantic" and the first strip from *Scream* #1.

The Firelight Isle

Paul Duffield

www.paulduffield.co.uk/firelightisle

The Firelight Isle is lovely, rich and vibrant. What Paul Duffield has achieved is a web comic perfectly designed to be read online and using the format to achieve a rare level of beauty. The use of colour (blue particularly, due to its significance to the story) and design is gorgeous. Each chapter is presented as a ribbon to be read from top to bottom, with each section unwrapping into the next. Circular or long sweeping panels dominate the layout, and these are used to great effect. The story centres on childhood friends Sen and Anlil, who are parted early on when Sen begins training to join the masked priests known as Ara, and takes place in a world that is well developed and complete with its own mythology and cosmology. While the comic is free to read, there's a Patreon page where people can support *The Firelight Isle*.

Third World War

Pat Mills, Carlos Ezquerro, D'Israeli, Angela Kincaid, Gordon Robson

Rebellion, 2019

Pb, 208pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781781087510



A particular strand of British comics has always been about conflict. Battle dealt with the conflict of the past, Judge

Dredd was about conflicts to come, and when *Third World War* appeared in the late 1980s – published in the explicitly political and ultimately short-lived *Crisis* – it felt very much about the conflicts of that moment. It deals with the influence of corporations around the world, youth unemployment and apathy, Western interference in other countries, particularly South America (unsurprising in the shadow of the Iran Contra affair), the influence of

particular branches of American evangelism and charismatic churches (this was the time of the controversial Nine O'Clock Service in Sheffield), and the effects of PTSD on soldiers in Northern Ireland.

Reading it now, the references feel fresh, contemporary and informed; Chick Tracts' most famous publication makes a cameo role, and Chumbawumba lyrics are quoted long before 'that song' brought them national attention. The stories by Pat Mills are hard-hitting, complex, and full of moral ambiguity, exploring the compromises ordinary people have to make when caught up in a system they feel they cannot change. There might be protagonists here, but there aren't any heroes. The artwork by Carlos Ezquerro, D'Israeli, and Angela Kincaid is powerful, striking and perfectly suited to the subject. Does the comic have contemporary relevance as we head into the 2020s? I would argue that it does. The influence of corporations is more pervasive than ever, and the religious right has made a comeback in the past few years. The stories in *Third World War* are just as important now as they were 30 years ago.

Twisted

Gab Kretschmar

www.twistedcomic.net/

Twisted is an ongoing web comic by German-based writer and artist Gab Kretschmar. It centres around four serial killers who are 'recruited' and taken to an abandoned library that holds its own secrets. There are some real fortean elements to the story, for example the use of electricity in the first arc (sorry), and the mythos-inspired monsters that haunt one of the characters. The visual style is reminiscent of Charles Addams's illustrations and Edward Gorey's monochrome art, with the occasional pop of colour used very effectively for emphasis. The storyline goes to some dark places, dealing with the traumas suffered by the characters, but the depictions never feel gratuitous, and there is humour here too. Available in both English and German.

SEND REVIEW DISCS TO: FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD, UK.

Imitation of life

In a film that resembles *Groundhog Day* without the laughs, Jesse Eisenberg and Imogen Poots find themselves stuck in a repetitive dystopian nightmare from which they can't wake up



Vivarium

Dir Lorcan Finnegan, Ireland/
Belgium/Denmark/USA 2019
On UK release from 27 March

House hunting is a tiresome ordeal that most people dread: in *Vivarium*, its horrors are taken to the extreme. Young couple Tom (Jesse Eisenberg) and Gemma (Imogen Poots) find themselves in a strange estate agent's office with an even stranger estate agent who takes them to an unnervingly odd neighbourhood consisting of completely identical houses with no signs of individuality whatsoever.

Being suddenly abandoned by the estate agent, the couple attempt to leave on their own, but regardless of which road they turn down, they always end up in front of the house they have just been shown – and things only get weirder as the film goes on.

From here, this unconventional science fiction horror focuses on how Tom and Gemma cope with their captivity as they seemingly settle into what appears to be a surreal simulation of suburban home life, where various supplies are dropped off outside their doorstep without any indication of who left them there. Tom and Gemma come to realise, as the film's title suggests, that their

They come to realise that their every move is being monitored

every move is being monitored by an outside force, and they find ways of coping as they continue to question what is going on and how they can escape. Their sense of unease is emphasised by the production design, which is unnerving in its simplicity; it's as if someone wanted to create an impression of something reassuring and homey but with no understanding of what such deeply human concepts entail. Everything – house, furnishings, garden – feels like a shallow imitation of the everyday objects we take for granted, allowing the superficiality of the setting to add further mystery to the film.

Both Eisenberg and Poots are relatable and bring a grounded energy to the characters of Tom and Gemma that keeps you invested in them throughout the film. The way their circumstances alter them as individuals, and as a couple, feels organic, serving as a realistic contrast to the otherwise thoroughly surreal and synthetic

scenario they find themselves in. As for the young boy featured in the film, while Senan Jennings's performance is fine in itself, what makes his character truly sinister is his voice, which makes his presence deeply unsettling in a way that brings to mind *The Omen*'s Damian Thorne and the pod people of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. The pacing is slow but smooth, showcasing the debilitatingly repetitive nature of the story without ever dragging before reaching an equally delirious and disturbing conclusion.

As if in a diabolical *Groundhog Day*, the protagonists are doomed to live identical days in the hellish fever dream that is the realm of *Vivarium*. Unlike the Bill Murray classic, however, there is nothing amusing about this scenario; the film does not feel the need to inject humour where it is not needed. Instead, *Vivarium* imagines its two protagonists as sincerely human characters trapped in a relentlessly dystopian setting, and the end result is an intriguing, deeply original and genuinely mystifying science fiction thriller that keeps a firm grip on its theme and storyline from start to finish.

Leyla Mikkelsen



The Mandalorian

Created by Jon Favreau, US 2019
Streaming on Disney+

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, audiences were enthralled by the vision of George Lucas's *Star Wars* as the film took the world by storm on its release in 1977. However, since Disney bought the rights, the ensuing onslaught of films has become exhausting, and many a lifelong fan will tell you that their love for the franchise has begun to fade due to feature fatigue.

While *Rogue One* gained a fan base after audiences' interest had been piqued by *The Force Awakens*, the flawed *Solo* was greeted with indifference and *The Last Jedi* caused so great a disturbance in the Force that it split fandom between those who appreciated the unpredictable direction of Rian Johnson's instalment and those who wanted more nostalgic regurgitations à la JJ Abrams. The sequels had become a tangled, directionless mess that had removed *Star Wars* from its simple, effective roots.

In the end, the trilogy would conclude with the dishevelled and convoluted *The Rise of Skywalker*, which spent the majority of its runtime undoing unpopular plot points and sidelining unpopular characters from *The Last Jedi* with a nauseating amount of fan service that would send Abrams's finale to the saga crashing to the ground.

Amid the bickering over the films, however, *The Mandalorian* was released on Disney's streaming platform Disney+ at the end of 2019, and the unthinkable happened: it was praised by both critics and fans. The creative forces behind the show are undoubtedly to thank for this. Considering his 2008 directorial effort, *Iron Man*, would kickstart the film franchise we now know as the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Jon Favreau



was a good choice to breathe new life into a property that had seemingly gone stale, particularly when paired with Dave Filoni, who has been integral to the creation and success of the majority of the animated *Star Wars* shows. The two share a love and understanding of the *Star Wars* universe that saturates *The Mandalorian*.

The stripped-down production design gives the world of *The Mandalorian* a look and feel in tune with that of the original trilogy; and while the show is not lacking in the reference department, the way these are used – fond, not forced – adds texture without detracting from the new story it wants to tell.

The show favours showing over telling; the mystery of the origins of the titular Mandalorian is maintained throughout the show, striking a balance that leaves you guessing while still giving you enough tidbits of his backstory to keep you invested as the character slowly develops from episode to episode. Towards the middle of the season, the storyline diverts from the overarching narrative to what would essentially be considered side quests in the world of gaming. However, these standalone episodes still serve a purpose as they increase the world-building, introduce new friends and foes, and expand on the Mandalorian's personality and skillset; they allow viewers to catch their breath before the show reverts to its main storyline, with spectacular results in the Taika Waititi-directed season finale.

Delving into the underworld of the bounty hunters as well as the history and code of the Mandalorians, the show expands on the *Star Wars* universe while also taking the franchise back to its roots. Delicately referencing everything from the infamously atrocious *Star Wars: Holiday Special* to the convoluted prequel trilogy with great success, *The Mandalorian* is like a tidal wave of healing bacta fluid that revitalises a wounded franchise with its mixture of engaging storytelling and intriguing world-building. It serves as a reminder of what made so many of us fall in love with *Star Wars* to begin with.

Leyla Mikkelsen



THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

The Parapod Movie

Dir Ian Boldsworth, UK 2020

On limited UK release: see <https://theparapod.com/>

Paranormal investigations can be a surprisingly fertile place for laughter. Like the first ghost hunt my sister ever attended. The earnest leader froze when he heard a mysterious crackling sound and said: "Listen! Can you hear that?" Julie lifted her hand meekly. "Sorry," she said. "I was opening my Toffee Crisp." Maybe it's just the desire to break the tension, or even the boredom, but creeping around graveyards with your mates wearing head torches has an inherently funny side. The vast majority of 'true', fly-on-the-wall paranormal shows miss this and major on the goose-bumps instead.

How refreshing, then, to see one that focuses on the giggles, as firm believer Barry Dodds drags his sceptical friend Ian Boldsworth (the film's director) around haunted locations in the UK, all in a quest to turn him into a believer. This road trip is interspersed with head-to-head studio chat, which usually revolves around Barry being called a gullible fool by Ian. Classic fortean sites make the itinerary, from the Ancient Ram Inn in Gloucestershire to the Screaming Woods of Dering in Kent, while the longest section is set in the black monk-haunted house of 30 East Drive in Pontefract. Just don't expect the usual melodramatic caution displayed by some paranormal presenters. Ian spends most of his time grabbing Barry's arse and blaming it on a ghost.

Believers might struggle with all this. Particularly when the film's strongest message is



Believers and sceptics too often think in terms of 'us and them'

that supernaturalists are unscientific idiots. Yet despite the heavy-handed mockery, there's plenty of reasons to celebrate *The Parapod Movie*, no matter what side of the belief fence you're on.

For a start, it'll do investigators good to be reminded of just how absurd ghost hunting can look to outsiders; as when Barry twitches in fright at a rustle in the forest and Ian laughs: "Do you honestly think we're the only things alive



in these woods?" Secondly, it's reasonable for lavish claims of the supernatural to prompt relentlessly sceptical questions – especially when those claims are often 'proven' by bizarre sensors and eBay-bought contraptions. What matters, though, is that these doubting questions don't often get the centre stage. Like it or not, as Erich Good argues, in popular media "paranormalism sells" and "non-paranormalism doesn't". At least, not as much. It's why the comedy element is so important to this film; hopefully, the laughter will draw people from both sides.

The film's main mission is to amuse, but there are thoughtful moments too – like when Barry and Ian debate religion in a church following an encounter, or when Ian argues with an outspoken medium in the living room of East Drive. For me, these two moments capture the key theme of the film – the relationship between sceptic and believer. We see the shirty, defensive antagonism (on each side) in Pontefract; but in the snow-covered church we see two men taking the piss out of each other's beliefs and yet staying together, travelling together, because they continue to respect each other as friends.

We need this reminder. Not least because believers and sceptics too often think in terms of 'us and them'. We have our books, our stars and our conferences and they have theirs. *The Parapod Movie* offers a more heartening vision. Two blokes trekking across the UK in a pimped up hearse, arguing, eyerolling, laughing and ultimately, despite it all, caring for each other. Two opposites, that end up making a surprisingly refreshing team. This film might not say a great deal about the unquiet dead, but it does give a hugely entertaining glimpse into the wonderfully noisy living. Recommended fortean viewing.

THE HAUNTED GENERATION

BOB FISCHER ROUNDS UP THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PARALLEL WORLDS OF POPULAR HAUNTOLOGY

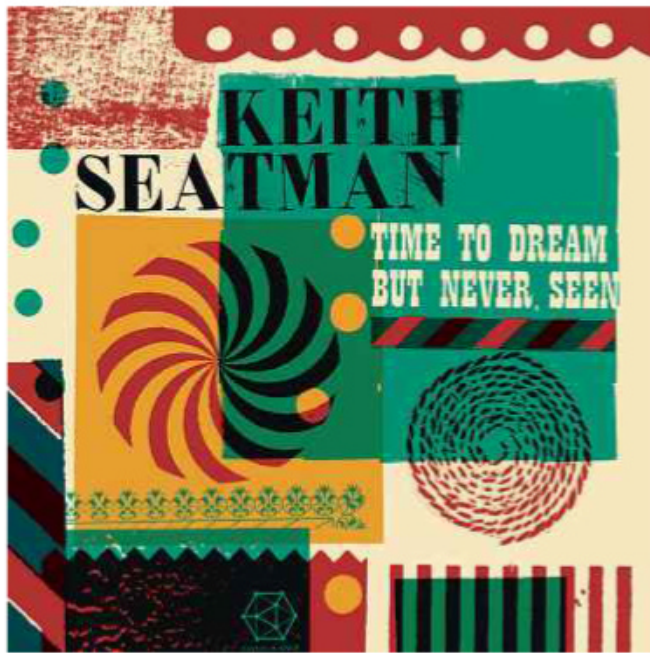
"It's that 'end of summer' thing," says Keith Seatman. "All the holiday-makers have gone, and you can see the grassy bits on the beach again. It can be eerie, and it can be wonderful. As soon as dusk falls, anything at the funfair looks weird..."

There is something deliciously otherworldly about the nature of the British seaside resort: the clanging fairground rides, the gaudy lights of the amusement arcades, the legacy of "Kiss Me Quick" sauciness and mystical, end-of-the-pier soothsaying. These memories are distilled almost overwhelmingly on Keith's new album *Time to Dream But Never Seen*, an extraordinary, hallucinatory evocation of a childhood spent in Southsea, Hampshire.

"The summer holidays would kick in, and for the first few weeks you'd be on the beach, down the fair, and on the pier," he remembers. "Then you'd hit the middle... and the last few weeks had this weird feeling of impending doom."

The album is structured to reflect this progression of the school holidays: from fizzy, sunshine-fuelled excitement, to mid-August ennui, to the chilling, autumnal melancholy that the adult Keith now finds so affecting. It's swathed in tootling fairground organs, psychedelic sound collage and the feel of vintage BBC Radiophonic Workshop experimentation: perhaps appropriately, given that one of Keith's childhood playgrounds was the now-derelict Fraser Gunnery Range, the imposing naval establishment used as a location for the 1972 *Doctor Who* story, 'The Sea Devils'.

Elsewhere, regular collaborator Douglas E Powell (whose own splendid folk album, *Overnight Low*, is out in April) provides a hypnotic spoken word interlude



entitled 'Speak Your Piece', seemingly a list of arcane, rural aphorisms: "Never toil on Sunday, the Good Lord tells us so / Save your back 'til Monday, and I'll give you seeds to sow." It all coalesces to form an utterly intoxicating concoction, and it's available now from the Castles in Space label.

Keith's album comes complete with glowing sleeve notes from Jim Jupp, co-founder of the legendary Ghost Box Records, and there are exciting developments on the Ghost Box front, too. April sees the release of *Puzzlewood*, the long-awaited new album from Plone. This Birmingham-based outfit were exploring retro-futurist sounds as early as the 1990s, and even their own history has a delightfully appropriate fuzziness: although *Puzzlewood* is described as their third album, the second has never officially materialised, despite countless nebulous rumours and bootlegs.

Regardless, *Puzzlewood* is a terrific comeback. A gloriously melodic homage to a golden age of library music (I defy anyone to hear 'Years and Elements' without imagining the BBC's iconic Test Card F, bridging the gap between Open University modules), it's refreshingly joyous and upbeat. Vintage synth sounds



leap around playfully, and there are nods to the earliest days of computer gaming too. 'Sunvale Run' sounds for all the world like the theme music to some jolly 1980s arcade game; perhaps not surprisingly given that core member Mike Johnston was also a founder of the ZX Spectrum Orchestra. As ever with Ghost Box releases, Julian House's accompanying artwork is perfect; and its lurid sweetshop qualities were apparently inspired by the vast collection of vintage ephemera amassed by Stockport man John Townsend, as immortalised in the new book *Wrappers Delight* (see FT389:66, 390:36-39).

Also catching my attention recently: *Parapsychedelia* by Heartwood Manse, a trans-Atlantic collaboration between Cumbria's Heartwood Institute and California's Panamint Manse. Taking the spirit of 1970s psychic research as its inspiration (track titles include 'Zenner Cards' and 'Precognition') this new album effortlessly weaves woozy analogue electronica and skittering beats around evocative soundbite samples. "Only now are we beginning to understand the strange and mysterious powers that exist in all of us..." crackles opening track 'Clairvoyeurism', instantly transporting me back

to unsettling Tuesday evenings in front of *Arthur C Clarke's Mysterious World*.

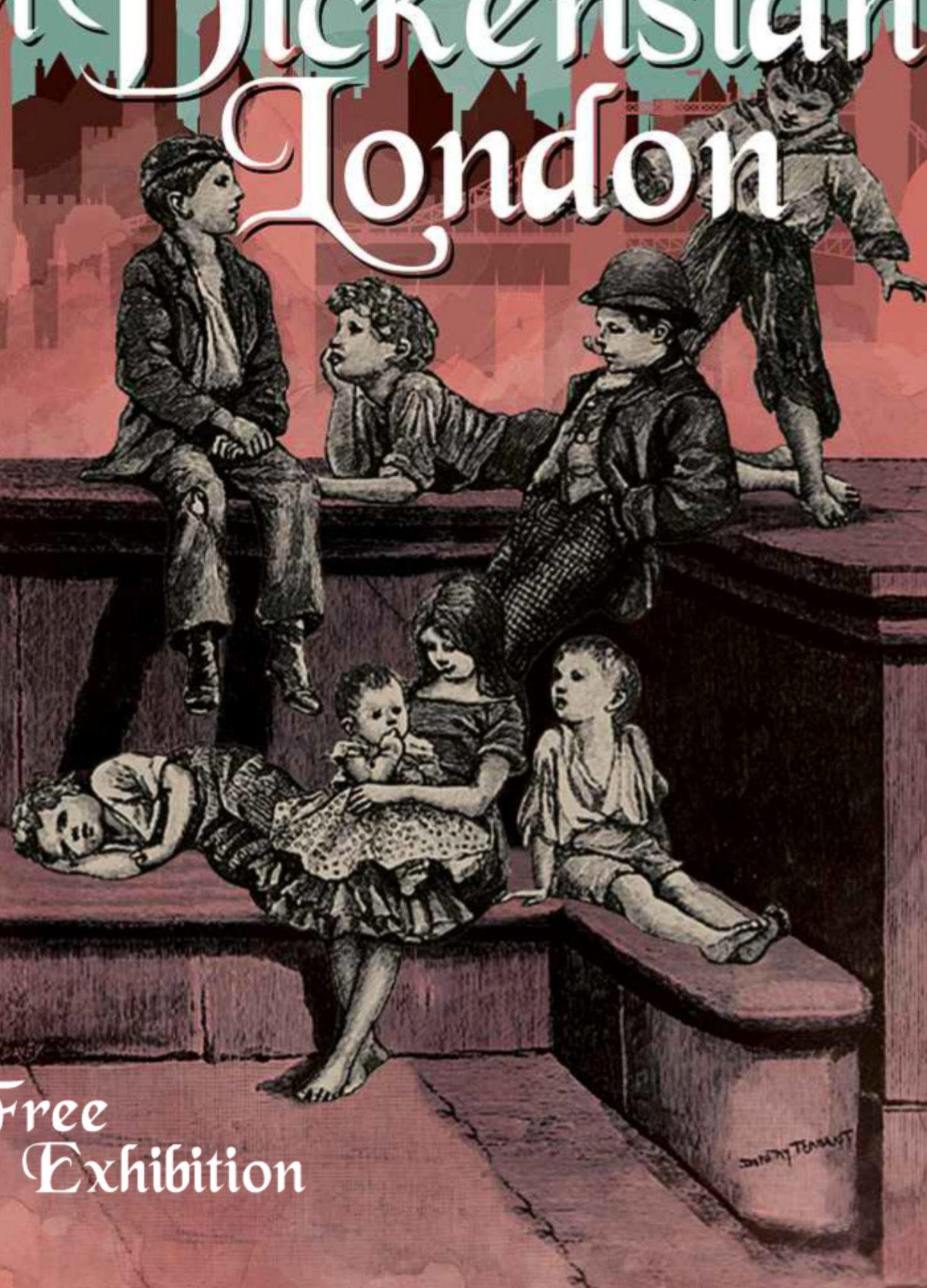
And I can also recommend *After Lights Out* by Capac, a collaboration with Northampton poet Tom Harding, and a wonderfully atmospheric ambient/spoken word exploration of the strangeness and disquiet of the night-time. "The room, the moonlight, the chair by the window, waiting as if for a ghost..." deadpans Harding, on 'Night Noises'.

Magnificently, the physical release comes in the form of an MP3 player embedded within a matchbox, complete with accompanying candle... which we are invited to light in a darkened room for the ultimate nocturnal listening experience. The perfect album for anyone who has lain awake at 3.30am, desperately attempting not to over-think the mysterious creaking coming from the airing cupboard.

Visit the Haunted Generation website at www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk, send details of new releases, or memories of the original "haunted" era to hauntedgeneration@gmail.com, or find me on Twitter... @bob_fischer

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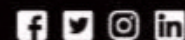
"In the little world in which children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt as injustice."

– Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*



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LETTERS

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Suspicious types

Noel Rooney [FT389:54-55] notes that while it may be asked what sort of person becomes a conspiracy theorist, no one asks, what sort of person becomes a Christian? This may be because most people professing Christianity do so because they were brought up in the faith, whereas no one is ever a conspiracy theorist from early childhood. One could ask about people who convert to Christianity in adulthood, and probably one could find some common characteristics, but Christianity has the advantage of centuries of tradition and illustrious exponents; no conspiracy theory ever built a cathedral.

I think that in any discussion of this sort, it isn't helpful to lump all conspiracy theories together. They vary a lot in terms of credibility, and the extent to which they are or are not clearly refuted by science. There is quite a difference between someone who suspects that all may not be as it seems regarding the JFK assassination, and someone who purports to believe something as bonkers as a flat Earth. Sometimes believing in a conspiracy theory is wishful thinking – the climate crisis is so alarming it is easier to put one's head in the sand and deny it. Other sorts of conspiracies appeal to people with low self esteem – "I may have a rotten job, but I know the hidden truth about such-and-such". One can't really generalise.

Roger Musson
Edinburgh

Pearls and Orwell

It's not so bizarre that pearls should have been found in the River Spey [FT388:7]. Fishing for river pearls was one of the seasonal occupations of the nomadic Scottish Travellers. Timothy Neat recorded this activity in his 1976 film *The Summer Walkers*, and in the book of the same name.

I was delighted to see George Orwell and Barry Baldwin, two of my favourite essayists, united in one column about the supernatural (the icing on the cake) [FT388:14]. Afterwards I found

SIMULACRA CORNER



This 'Sea Dragon' was exposed at low tide on the beach at Hauxley, Northumberland, and was photographed by Vince Gledhill on New Year's Day.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteanimes.com.

this, in Orwell's *Essays* (Everyman, 2002, p.79): "When the Caliph Omar destroyed the libraries of Alexandria he is supposed to have kept the public baths warm for eighteen days with burning manuscripts, and great numbers of tragedies by Euripides and others are said to have perished, quite irrecoverably. I remember that when I read about this as a boy it simply filled me with enthusiastic approval."

Lewis JW Hurst
Edogawa-ku, Tokyo, Japan

Top tomes

Good to see acknowledged my immediate championing of Patrick Harpur's perceptive embrace of the liminal nature of so much forteana. The daimonic reality concept not only promised a fresh perspective on phenomena, but also delivered [FT388:57]. The mid-1990s analysis has stood the test of time and I share FT editor David Sutton's assessment of its top 10 forteana tomes placement; as challenging and welcome

on publication as *Space-Time Transients and Unusual Events* by Michael A Persinger and Gyslaine F Lafreniere. Following publication of my review in both *Magonia* and *Folklore Frontiers*, the author wrote: "Many thanks for the handsome reviews: you're the only reviewer (incl. *Sunday Times*, *Literary Review*, *Independent*, etc.) who seems (a) to have actually read the book I wrote (rather than one they imagined I wrote) and (b) to have grasped what I was driving at, so that's encouraging at least."

Paul Screeton
Seaton Carew, County Durham

Fracking

In David Hambling's report on fracking [FT387:14], he explains that earthquakes are caused by release of pressure on fault lines between tectonic plates. This is certainly true, but most fracking takes place in areas that are not anywhere near active tectonic plate boundaries (which are often oceanic areas). Many moderate

to small quakes occur in the plate interior. Most geological formations have non-active faults resulting from past stresses. Movement can occur along these small faults from residual stresses and in response to release or addition of new stresses (melting glaciers, new reservoirs, increased pore pressure). The Earth may rebalance by reactivating existing – and often unmapped – ancient faults. Therefore, fracking-induced earthquakes surprise people who are in areas that are not normally seismically active. Careful geological characterisation of a fracking area goes a long way towards predicting the potential for increased quakes. I was relieved that he didn't repeat the commonly used, but mistaken, assumption that fracking 'lubricates' the fault. It's more complicated than that.

Sharon Hill, geologist
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Forest of Dean manikin

I wrote about the mini-humanoid in the Forest of Dean in 1924 [FT389:30-31] in my own magazine, *Flying Snake* (vol1, #2, Oct 2011 pp.5-7). I came to the conclusion that it could either have been an aborted foetus or a species of bat. This was my final paragraph: "Significantly, the creature was covered in hair and although compared to a bat, wings are not mentioned. Could it have been an aborted foetus? The largest bat it could have been would possibly be a Mouse-eared bat (*Myotis myotis*). Or the Greater Horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*). One could have strayed from the south coast of Britain to the Forest of Dean and these bats use caves. Poor lighting, shadows and imagination could have caused the observer to mistake several greater horseshoe bats in a tight cluster as one bat. Supposing it was a bat, and that is a big supposition, could it have been an escaped fruit bat? Or perhaps it was an owl? We will probably never know."

Richard Muirhead
Macclesfield, Cheshire

The Bride on the Bridge

How about this for a solution of the location for the Bride on the Bridge [FT389:42-47]? The obvious route from Alton to Formby is the A523, “a minor two lane road”. Half an hour at 30mph brings one to the locality of a “bridge with waist-high walls on either side” “over a small river” at 53:10:9.59N 2:6:18.87W, the River Dane at Hugbridge Farm. 1.5 miles (2.4km) further on is the Queen’s Arms at Bosely, “a rather isolated moderately sized pub with a not very large car park and a number of houses beyond” at 53:11:13.16N 2:7: 24.29W. All on Google Streetview. This seems a reasonable fit to me.

Roger J Morgan, *By email*



Then there are Rudkin’s stage plays. The tribulations of a couple’s attempts to conceive in *Ashes* conclude in a terrifying vision. Equally apocalyptic are *The Sons of Light*, *The Triumph of Death* and *Marlin Unchained*. An amazing writer in the same league as those he admires: Carl Dreyer, Andrei Tarkovsky and Alfred Hitchcock.

John Calvert

Heaton Moor, Stockport

Giant eels

Regarding the reported presence of giant eels in UK waters [FT388:53]: I wish it were true about these critically endangered fish – but, alas, in all the angling literature there are no credible accounts of *Anguilla anguilla* (common eel) over 11lb (5kg). All claims above this weight have proved to be lies (yes, fishermen do sometimes lie) or errant (marine) conger eels forced into brackish/fresh rivers in times of stress such as prolonged cold. I’d love it to be true – I’ve wasted much of my life trying to catch eels – but I fear it is not so... That is, unless someone finds a ‘prison water’ (no longer accessible from river/stream systems) that contains a large old eel that has lost its spawning instinct. But in that case I fear the stress of capture would prove fatal.

Alan Gardiner

Burgess Hill, West Sussex

Although nowhere near the scale of the Drewstown ‘horse eels’ story, Richard Freeman’s article on giant Irish eels reminds me of an exceptionally large specimen I saw in the mid-1970s in the River Stour that forms the border between Suffolk and Essex. Back then, the lower reaches of the river were very different from today with deep, peaty, slow-flowing stretches that were dredged regularly to keep the water healthy, and like all the muddy rivers of East Anglia, it was absolutely packed with eels. (The Isle of Ely and the cathedral city of Ely in the Cambridgeshire Fens were named after the Anglo Saxon word for eel, ‘Eilig’).

Most eels rarely ever got any longer than a metre (3ft 3in), but one particular afternoon, in the

Starling Apocalypse

As an avid birdwatcher, I have to say that “starling specialist” Anne Goodenough’s response to the 225 birds found dead on a country lane is quite simply not good – enough [FT389:26]. As she should know, starling murmurations occur at dusk when the Sun is on – or just below – the horizon; so how can the “Sun’s reflection” be coming off a wet road and cause “quite a lot of glare”?

My take on these multiple starling deaths would be the attention of a predator – sparrowhawk, peregrine etc – attracted to the murmuration. The best murmurations are actually when a predator is present, causing the whirling shapes as the starlings try to evade the attacks. A flock of starlings fly so efficiently without collision by each reacting to the flight its closest neighbour. If a predator attacks while the flock is close to the ground and one bird turns in the wrong direction, they will all follow, and in rare circumstances collide with the ground.

Ant Marriott

Hyde, Greater Manchester

Cathedral ghosts

Regarding ghosts in cemeteries [FT389:18-21], there was a spate of this in St Michael’s Cathedral in Coventry. In the early 19th century, the north side of the cathedral was supposedly haunted by a ghostly monk. It got so frequent that residents of Priory Row used to take pot shots at it with a musket and left musket ball holes in the wooden door. In 1822 there was a very bad haunting, again amongst the gravestones of the north side of the cathedral. It used to happen in the early hours of the morning. Pretty much everyone in Priory Row complained to the magistrate about it, so he told the watch to be particularly vigilant. One night they saw it, so George Farmer, one of the watchmen described as “a stout man with a stout heart”, approached it and it was... a bricklayer called David Dry, with a sheet over his head. He did try to deny it, but the evidence was overwhelming! He spent three months in gaol. See *Haunted Coventry* by David McGrory, pp 21-22.

Gary Stocker

Radford Semele, Warwickshire

David Rudkin

Re *Of Mud & Flame: the Penda’s Fen Sourcebook* [reviewed FT389:61]: I believe an examination of David Rudkin’s work is long overdue. While Rudkin describes *Penda’s Fen* as a “political piece”, I think there is a great deal more to be discovered in the work of this visionary and neglected writer. Readers may remember the remarkable three-hour odyssey *Artemis 81*, broadcast by the BBC in 1981 and featuring Hywel Bennett, Sting and a very young Daniel Day-Lewis. Dismissed at the time as “pretentious” and “incomprehensible”, I regard it as a towering example of what television can achieve, on the level of the (original) *Prisoner* and *Gormenghast*.

Earlier in his career, Rudkin wrote the play *White Lady* about the horrifying implications of pesticide use in agriculture; and *The Living Grave*, which featured the story of Kitty Jay, buried in an unmarked grave on Dartmoor, and involving the regression theories of the late Joe Keeton.

LETTERS

Antibiotics

I will now try not to over simplify a complex issue (and there are people better qualified than myself to comment), but this submission is combining my understanding of germ theory, my observations working in a hospital as well as subjective experience. It is not necessarily over prescribing antibiotics per se (although this is a factor), but prescribing practices and human factors combined with the mutagenic ability of bacteria. I would suggest that the generation of superbugs comes about primarily because of the following:

1) Poor compliance: someone gets antibiotics from their doctor but instead of taking the course (so many a day over so many days), they take them until the acute symptoms of illness, be it discomfort or oozing puss, has passed. This can take place on the first day or so on the course of medications, so the individual does not 'kill the bug' and it mutates in the process, each time becoming more resistant. This behaviour in humans is sadly very common.

2) Poor antibiotic stewardship: the use of more powerful antibiotics in first line treatment, and especially the medications that should be kept in reserve. But who would not want the 'best' or most 'powerful' regardless of cost? From what I gather, in some very populated parts of the world this is a problem with medications available without prescription but at a cost. Again, with poor compliance, this gives the infectious disease the opportunity to mutate, this time in response to overcome the most powerful and broadest spectrum medications available.

3) Overuse on animal husbandry (another example of poor stewardship): even in free range (and certainly in feed lots and other intensive farming practices) giving commercial livestock antibiotics has become routine, given like sustenance. This excessive unnecessary use gives the 'bugs' an endless opportunity to be exposed to antibiotics and mutate accordingly.

4) Hospitals: these have



'Phantom' Concorde

The 1975 sighting of a 'phantom' Concorde in a field between Bridgnorth and Whitchurch [FT382:39] could easily be explained as a radio-controlled scale model being flown by a model aero club. There was at least one model Concorde being flown in the 1970s by the Tyldesley Model Flying Club (see photo), but no doubt there were several more. The Telford model Aero Club is one of the oldest established clubs in the Midlands and the location of its current 100ft (30m) runway in a field at Isombridge is around 20 miles (32km) north of Bridgnorth and around 1.5 miles (2.4km) from the A442, on the left as one travels north. Alternatively, Al Olgilvy's suggestion that it might have been a sighting of misidentified Vulcan bomber [FT386:74] also seems plausible.

Alistair Moffatt
Totnes, Devon

become a locus of further infections. They become full of people with all kinds of ailments and some so sick they are immunocompromised, all the bacteria (and viruses to boot) coming together in the one place. These get into everything and everywhere. Sterilisation of machines and equipment is a top priority requiring special certification, processes with double, triple and even quadruple levels of rechecking before use and reuse. I know of people treated for tuberculosis (TB) who are kept in rooms with negative atmosphere with filters for microscopic droplets to reduce the chance of its spread. All surfaces and hands require repeated sterilisation to hinder cross infection (and can lead to other problem of the dermis). Nevertheless, common skin

bacteria that people live with (in balance with its presence and the individual response) can become methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), spread between people quickly by contact (surfaces, materials) and can invade numerous bodily systems with fatal (or disfiguring) results.

Even before the advent of antibiotics, mutating bacteria were decimating populations. *Yersinia pestis* was known to present in three forms: Bubonic plague (via bite from insect entering the blood and then invading the lymph), the most common and survivable

form with basic care (fluids/nutrition), that could mutate into septicemic plague, the so called dreaded Black Death (invading tissue and often fatal), which would then mutate into pneumonic plague (concentrated in the lung), with the coughing and

wheezing – which is the most contagious and least survivable. Pneumonic plague could lead directly to another case of pneumonic, or a cough could deposit the germ on a surface, get into a tiny scratch (wound) and become septicemic etc. Once it is out there it is going to reproduce, as that is its primary function, and mutate, as that is in its nature. Truly fascinating, lest we forget this battle. And all of this before getting to discuss gram positive and gram negative bacteria.

As with the MMR vaccine, one can find all kind of points of view as to whether the use of these medicines is necessary or another cause for further concern. I tend to favour herd immunity and other forms of empirical evidence, so I visit qualified medical professionals, take medications as prescribed, get immunised – and I am in good shape for someone without a spleen.

However, don't panic! Wash your hands, take medications as prescribed and maybe look up the routines of barrier nursing when dealing with sick people and animals.

As for Tinkerbell dying, I am certain that is a myth.

William Wilson
Mount Isa, Queensland

Publishing curse

I recently chanced upon a letter from classicist/novelist/poet Robert Graves, sent to TS Eliot at Faber & Faber (9 Feb 1955). Full text in Toby Faber, *Faber & Faber: The Untold Story* (2019). Graves sent his controversial *The White Goddess* to three publishers. The first rejected it as uneconomical – he died within the month. The second rejected it as absurd and of no interest – he died within the month. The third – TS Eliot – accepted it with enthusiasm. He went on to win the Nobel Prize, the Order of Merit, & a smash Broadway hit with his play *The Cocktail Party*. I think I shall attach this with all future submissions to editors everywhere...

Barry Baldwin
Calgary, Canada

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

Impossible footprints

Back in 1963, I was a young joiner given the job of replacing wooden skirting boards in a three-storey house in Holyhead, Anglesey. It had been empty for years and was musty, dusty and very dirty. While downstairs on the second day I heard the distinct sound of someone walking in the bedrooms above, but thought it was my boss come to check how the job was progressing. The only odd thing was that he would normally whistle when he came to check on his workers, a kind of warning that he was there. I checked, but found no one. The same thing happened a few days later, but I thought it must be my imagination.

Some time later, just for curiosity, I went up to the attic and was astounded to see footprints in thick dust coming directly from a wall and going directly into another wall. There were none going to the door; it was really spooky. I didn't tell anyone at work as I knew they would have taken the mickey – but on reflection I realised they had shown an unusual interest in asking how the job was coming along.

After finishing in the bedrooms for the day, I left my tool bag in an alcove and shut all the doors. The following morning I was surprised to find all the doors open and my tool bag moved slightly.

On going back to the workshop I told my boss and in a rather casual manner he said: "Well I knew, had I told you, you wouldn't have gone to do the job. The other joiners won't go there."

"Told me what?" I asked.

"Some years ago," he replied, "a man had murdered his wife and two children and then hanged himself in the bedroom you have been working in. It's been empty for years. That's why I didn't tell you. Sorry!"

I was speechless, but plucked up enough courage



to go back the following day to complete the job. At least I knew the man was dead and couldn't harm me... could he?

Melvyn Griffiths
Llanfairpwll, Anglesey

Mother's dream

Sometime during the early 1970s, I am convinced I experienced telepathy. I recall I was in the living room of my home reading *Titus Groan* by Mervyn Peake. My mother was asleep in an armchair some four feet [1.2m] away. Totally absorbed in the book, I had just finished reading the part where the main character, Titus, as a young child, is beside a lake with his guardian, Mrs Slagg. He strays from the woman and heads towards the water's edge, where it is suggested a 'shark' is lurking near the shore. However, Nanny Slagg rescues Titus when she becomes aware of the danger and rushes to the lakeside to pull him clear. It is later inferred that the supposed shark is the character Steerpike, swimming across the lake.

Just as I had finishing reading this passage, my mother

woke up and said she had had a strange dream. As she described this dream, it became immediately apparent that I had somehow relayed what I was reading to my mother's subconscious mind. In her dream she had taken my young nephew Adrian to nearby Eastney Beach, whereupon he wandered off towards the sea, just as a shark appeared near the shore, and she had to dash to pull him clear of danger. I still remember the hairs rising on the back of my neck, as I realised how undeniably uncanny this experience was. Nothing like it has happened before or since. Thank goodness I wasn't reading one of the more nightmarish sequences from the book!

Nick Maloret
Milton, Hampshire

Sharp knife!

This account popped up on my Facebook memories recently. My daughter, then aged two (so this would be four years ago), fell asleep across my lap on the sofa in the front room one afternoon. I extricated myself and left her napping while I

went to the kitchen to catch up on some housework. I was at the sink washing up and there was no sightline between us. I reached out to take up and wash a little vegetable peeling knife when I heard my daughter call out in alarm. She was shouting "Sharp knife! Sharp knife!" I would like to think it was an indication of a strong mother-daughter bond – but it was probably just an odd coincidence.

Clare Law
Tunbridge Wells, Kent

Strange flashes

Jim D of Warrington, Cheshire, gives details of three occasions when he and his wife experienced weird flashes that lit up everything around them [FT382:77]. Twenty years ago, a similar thing happened to my then-husband and me. We were walking through a field he knew well as he was a farmer. It was February, around 8pm, so still dark. Our cottage was at the bottom of this field in a hamlet in Wiltshire called Shute End. Suddenly, there was a flash so bright it lit everything up for about a second. Everything was clear, the trees, grass, bushes, everything. It was as if the flash came from above us but not from the sky. We lived in a rural area, there were no streetlights around and this flash was far brighter than any car headlights could be.

My 18-year-old was awoken at 1am in August 2018 after he said he saw a very bright flash directly outside the bedroom window of our bungalow. It was not random lightning because he said it was "too low down". He had been asleep and something had woken him up moments before. We are not overlooked by properties at the back of us and there aren't any roads nearby. We tried to replicate the experience the next night using a torch, but my son insists the 'flash' was 100 times brighter than any torch.

Alison Crocker
Salisbury, Wiltshire

PECULIAR POSTCARDS

JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past celebrates the strange show-business career of a piggy prodigy and some porcine pretenders.

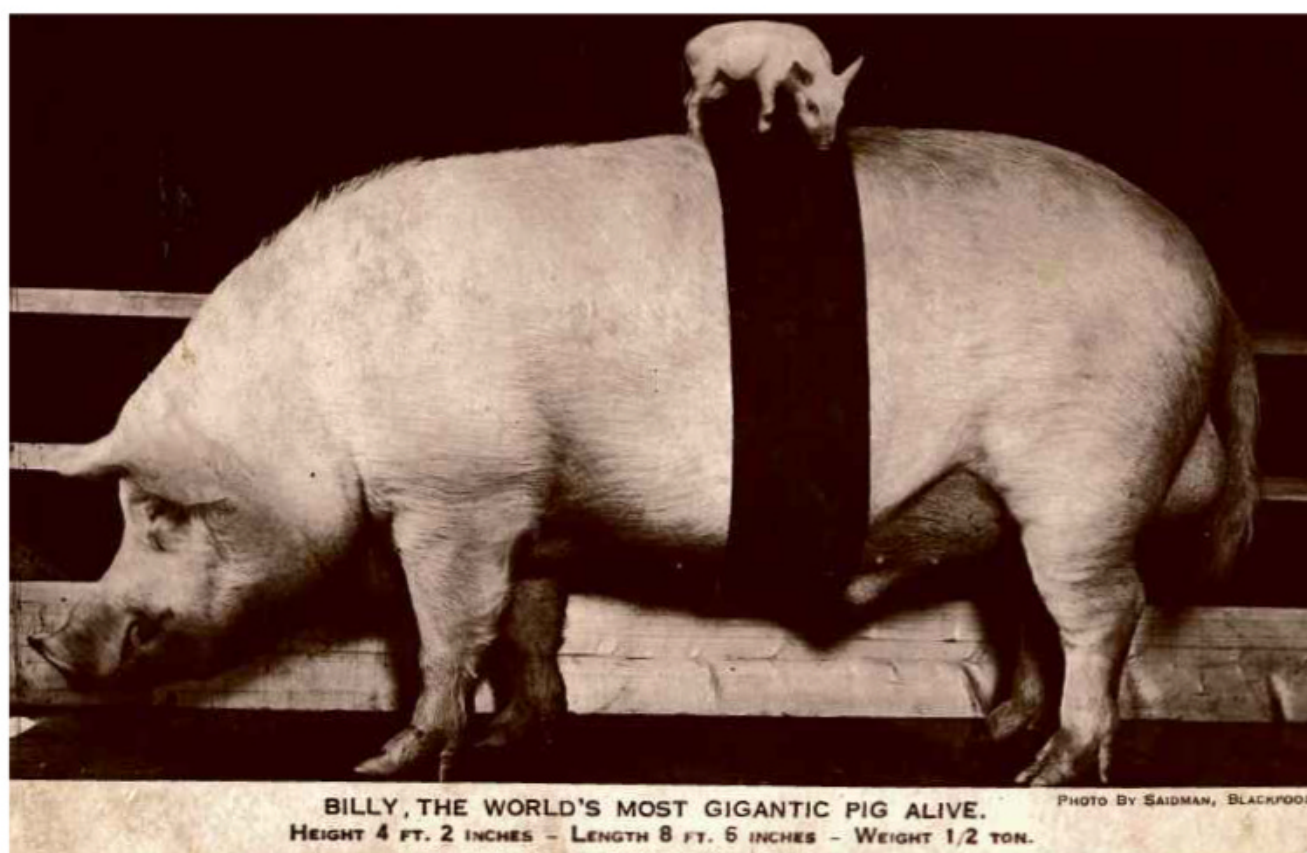


3. BILLY, THE MOST GIGANTIC PIG ALIVE

The scene is a provincial summer fair in the North of England; the year is 1934. The giant is not particularly tall, the dwarf not particularly short, and the strong man not particularly strong; yet, the audience eagerly awaits the afternoon's main attraction, a famous out-of-town performer of great talent and verve whose fame has preceded him. At the appointed time, the showman calls out: "Step right up, Ladies and Gentlemen! Here he is, unique in the world, the envy of breeders and fanciers everywhere, the Towering Monarch of the Porcine Race – BILLY!"

Billy the Pig began his show-business career in May 1934, under the ownership and management of Mr J Gardiner. Billed as the biggest and heaviest pig in the world, weighing half a ton, he was 3ft 10in (117cm) tall, 8ft 3in (251cm) long and 6ft 3in (193cm) in girth. Every day, he ate four cases of apples and seven buckets of milk with pollard and bran, plus a liberal supply of cabbages and turnips. He went on tour to Hartlepool, Hull and Lincoln, and was kept busy throughout the summer months. Billy grew steadily, and when this postcard of him was published in the mid-1930s, with a tiny piglet standing on his back, he had increased significantly in girth. My copy of the card has an inscription on the back: "How would you like a couple of rashers off this pig? He is being shown at Olympia Blackpool & is almost too fat to move."

Billy carried on performing throughout 1935 and 1936. When he was at the Pleasure Fair in Burnley, a newspaper noted that his grunts had



recently been broadcast by the BBC from his show pen at the Newcastle Festival. At the King's Hall Christmas Carnival in Belfast, it was said that he had been insured for £5,000, and that when he died the carcass would be presented to the British Museum. Billy could have been turned into a string of pork sausages long enough to reach from London to Glasgow, or so at least it was claimed.

For the 1937 season, Billy was teamed with 'Nero', the World's Largest Dog, a sturdy St Bernard the size of a donkey, and 'Wee Jimmy', a midget racehorse just 23in (58cm) tall. "Everybody should see these remarkable animals as their educational value is undoubtedly unique!" exclaimed a newspaper advertisement. For the 1938 season, Billy and Wee Jimmy continued to perform, but with no appearance from Nero. It is likely that Billy expired later that year, having kept one step

ahead of the butcher's knife for four full years of touring.

It is curious to note that in 1949 another Billy the Pig surfaced, performing with Wee Jimmy, the world's smallest racehorse, and Nero, the world's biggest St Bernard dog. Since the latter animal was described as devouring 25lb (11kg) of meat every day and being just nine months old, he cannot have been the original performer from 1937. They toured throughout 1950, but a 1951 advertisement does not mention the horse. The second Billy could have provided 8,000 people with their bacon ration for a fortnight, it was said in the advertisements. He may well have carried on a small-time career at the Northern fairs well into the 1950s, his ultimate fate being obscured by the end of the coverage in that valuable online resource, the British Newspaper Archive. The hulking Billy II, the

dapper midget horse, and the formidable St Bernard dog walk off into the sunset of small-time show business.

The first Billy the Pig was definitely one of the heaviest hogs ever recorded, but weighing in at a little more than half a ton, he is hardly the world champion. In 1901, Curly Boy, a hog weighing in at 1,255lb (569kg), was slaughtered in Rushville, Illinois. Big Bill, an American pig owned by Elias Buford Butler of Jackson, Tennessee, was 9ft (2.7m) long and had the amazing weight of 2,552lb (1,158kg); he was active in the 1930s, and would have been exhibited at the Chicago World Fair had he not broken his leg and been put down. Big Bill has seen off challenges from a Chinese pig weighing in at 1,984lb (900kg) in 2004, and the 2008 American pig Big Norm, estimated to weigh 1,600lb (726kg), and he remains the world record holder today.

Cosy Crime Pays For Indy Author

Lynn Florkiewicz's dream of being a writer began when she was just six years old, but it had to sit on the back-burner until, at the age of 45, she took a creative writing course with The Writers Bureau, and started out on a whole new adventure...



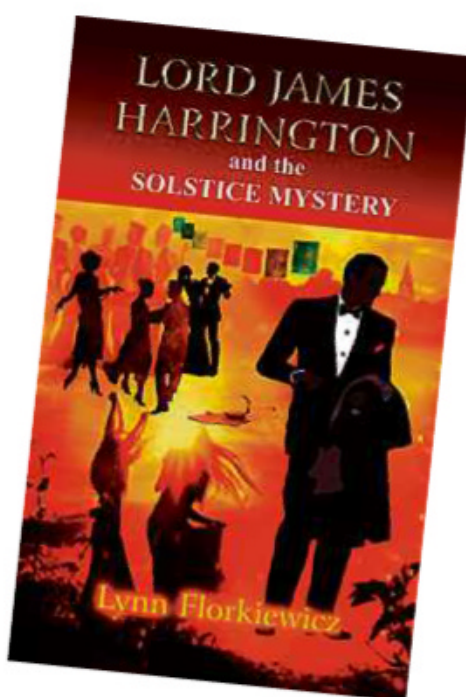
Lynn Florkiewicz

Avid reading as a child laid the foundation for Lynn's love of mystery and crime stories, and she always imagined that one day she'd write her own. When she grew up though, marriage and a promising career as a singer/songwriter on the British and American folk circuits gave her little time to pursue writing until, after a bout of particularly debilitating illness, she decided it was time to bring it to the fore.

Lynn enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Creative Writing Course back in 2001. She worked steadily through its 20 tutor-marked assignments, earning her course fees back from published work and getting placed/highly commended in several writing competitions along the way. Confidence thoroughly boosted, she then decided to try writing a children's adventure story - *The Quest for the Crystal Skulls*, of which, BBC Springwatch's Michaela Strachen said: 'There are many ways to create awareness about what we're doing to planet Earth, I found this an incredibly powerful and compelling one. I read it in one go.' (*The Quest for the Crystal Skulls* is available from Amazon and Penpress Partnership Book Publishing).

Inspired by a long-time love of cosy crime (Agatha Christie, Carola Dunn etc), Lynn's next move was to follow her

childhood dream and create her own murder-mystery series. And so it was that Lord James Harrington, country landowner, ex-racing driver and amateur sleuth, was born. When her first whodunit, *The Winter Mystery*, was launched on Kindle it received a plethora of five-star reviews from cosy crime fans, and that was all the encouragement Lynn needed to write more.



Five years on, and Lord James Harrington is a well-established character with his name on nine book covers. Lynn is already in the process of writing a tenth, with plans to release a new mystery every year. The books are all available from Amazon in Kindle, print and audio format, as well

as from Lord Harrington's very own website: www.lordjamesharrington.com.

'I've created a world that I adore and I love to slip into that imaginary community and meet up with my characters,' says Lynn. 'I am not a literary writer. I'm not here to change the world or make you think, I want to entertain people and, from the feedback I've received, I tick that box.'

Recently, Lord James Harrington was picked-up by Magna Publishing (part of Ulverscroft). They intend to release the whole series in audio and large print formats, and already, the American Audio File Magazine has awarded the first of these recordings with an Earphone Audio Award.

Lynn is just one of many Writers Bureau students who have found their way to publishing success. So if you harbour a dream to write, they can help. Their courses provide students with a professional writer as a personal tutor and cover all types of writing, as well as teaching the business side of being an author. To request free details, contact The Writers Bureau at: www.writersbureau.com or call – 0800 856 2008. Quote ATT19

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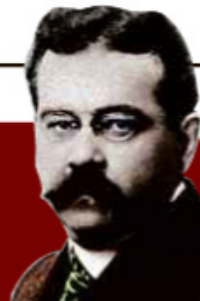
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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMix

BURNING JUDAS

HUNT EMERSON

with ROB GANDY

TOXTETH - LIVERPOOL - GOOD FRIDAY...



KIDS!
HORDES
OF
KIDS,
IN
GANGS!

EACH GANG CARRIES A TOTEM!
A FIGURE MADE OF RAGS
AND STUFFING...



A JUDAS!



THEY TERRORIZE LOCAL PEOPLE...



THEN THEY MAKE FIRES, AND BURN THEIR JUDAS!



INEVITABLY, THE BIZZIES TURN UP...



THE WILD CHILDREN SCATTER, AND
THE SCUFFERS ARE LEFT TO PUT
OUT THE FIRES, AND IMPRISON
THE JUDAS EFFIGIES...



...AND BY 11 O'CLOCK THE
STREETS ARE QUIET AGAIN!



THIS TRADITION OF BURNING JUDAS WAS CONFINED TO A FEW STREETS IN TOXTETH, LIVERPOOL'S DOCK AREA, FOR A MATTER OF 40 TO 50 YEARS IN THE 20TH CENTURY. IT IS THOUGHT THAT CHILDREN FIRST SAW PORTUGUESE AND SPANISH SAILORS FLOGGING A JUDAS ON THE DECKS OF THEIR SHIPS ON GOOD FRIDAY - AN IBERIAN EASTER CUSTOM.

THE PHOTO REFERENCE IS OF MADRYN STREET IN THE DINGLE, PART OF TOXTETH, THE HOUSE ON THE RIGHT IS WHERE RINGO STARR LIVED AS A CHILD!

COMING NEXT MONTH



MARK OF THE WITCH
IN SEARCH OF BRITAIN'S RITUAL
PROTECTION SYMBOLS



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HAMPSHIRE'S WICKER MAN
AND BUTSER BELTANE FESTIVAL



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MYSTERY VANISHINGS,
RESURRECTION FAILS
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 392

ON SALE 23 APR 2020

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Catherine Sweatt-Mueller, 62, from Minnesota, was staying with her elderly parents in a remote cabin on Red Pine Island in Canada when she was killed by a black bear (*Ursus americanus*) in what experts called an "extremely rare" attack. She went out in the evening as her two dogs were barking, but never returned. The dogs, one of them injured, returned alone to the cabin and the police were called. Officers found the bear standing over the woman's body and shot it dead. The last fatal bear attack in Ontario was in 2005. *Metro*, 6 Sept 2019.

William Blunsdon killed his 77-year-old grandmother with a bayonet after believing she had been replaced by a witch. Dorothy Bowyer was stabbed to death at her home in the Peak District village of Buxworth in Derbyshire on 14 February 2019. The family's ex-mountain rescue dog was also killed. Blunsdon had lived at the address for about 18 months. *D.Telegraph*, 6 Aug 2019.

A 74-year-old woman who died after becoming stuck behind a kitchen unit is believed to have been searching for a mouse. Carole Williams, of Clifton, Bristol, was placed on a missing persons list until a taxi driver raised the alarm when she failed to appear for a scheduled journey and did not respond to phone calls. Police found her body in the small confined space, where she may have died from dehydration, although no definitive cause of death was established. It was stated at the inquest that friends of Mrs Williams reported her mentioning a mouse in her house. *BBC News*, 29 Oct 2019.

A Knoxville, Iowa, couple held a 'gender-reveal' party to announce whether their baby was a boy or girl. During the celebrations, one guest, Pamela Kreimeyer, 56, was struck by metal debris from a home-made rocket and killed. The projectile was intended to shoot blue- or pink-coloured powder into the air. *D.Telegraph*, 29 Oct 2019.

Noah Inman, 13, was playing basketball with friends in a quiet Chicago suburb, Hammond. When he suddenly fell to the ground, a seizure was suspected, but he had in fact been struck by a falling bullet

and later died in hospital. Police believe the bullet had been shot into the sky as part of that year's Independence Day celebrations. *(Melbourne) heraldsun.com*, 12 July 2017.



Nicola Townsend, 50, of Bath, Somerset, has been found guilty of killing her father, Terence Townsend, 78, with a TV remote control after throwing it at his head in a fit of anger on 27 December 2017. She then pushed him over, breaking several ribs. He died of pneumonia 12 days later in hospital. In the first case of this type, in 2009, Paul Harvey, 47, of Euston in London, killed his wife by throwing a remote control at her. Gloria Laguna, 48, died from a brain haemorrhage after the device hit a weak artery in her neck. *D.Mail, Sun*, 28 Aug 2019.

A man died after choking on a piece of meat five months after his brother had died in the same way. Selwyn Francis, 63, choked whilst dining at the Mountain Park Hotel in Flint, Wales, on 2 July 2019, and died in hospital two days later. The cause of death was given as brain injury and cardiac arrest, and ruled as accidental.

A day before his death, an inquest heard how his brother Gwyn Francis had died after choking on a piece of steak at a pub in February that year. Selwyn Francis's own inquest was told of his limited ability to swallow food after a series of strokes the previous year. The surviving brother, Kenneth, told the court: "All three of us were fast eaters, none of us chewed food the recommended amount." *BBC News*, 6 Dec 2019.

A Massachusetts man armed with a crossbow accidentally killed his neighbour after rushing to his aid. The neighbour had called for help while being attacked by two dogs, and had barricaded himself behind a door. The armed man, standing at the foot of the stairs, shot upwards towards the dogs, hitting one, but the shot went through the door and struck his unfortunate neighbour. A young girl, also in the apartment, was unharmed. Officials said one of the dogs belonged to the deceased neighbour, and the other was owned by his girlfriend. Police were forced to shoot the dogs, as they were dangerously out of control. *thedailybeast.com*, 6 Feb 2020.

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